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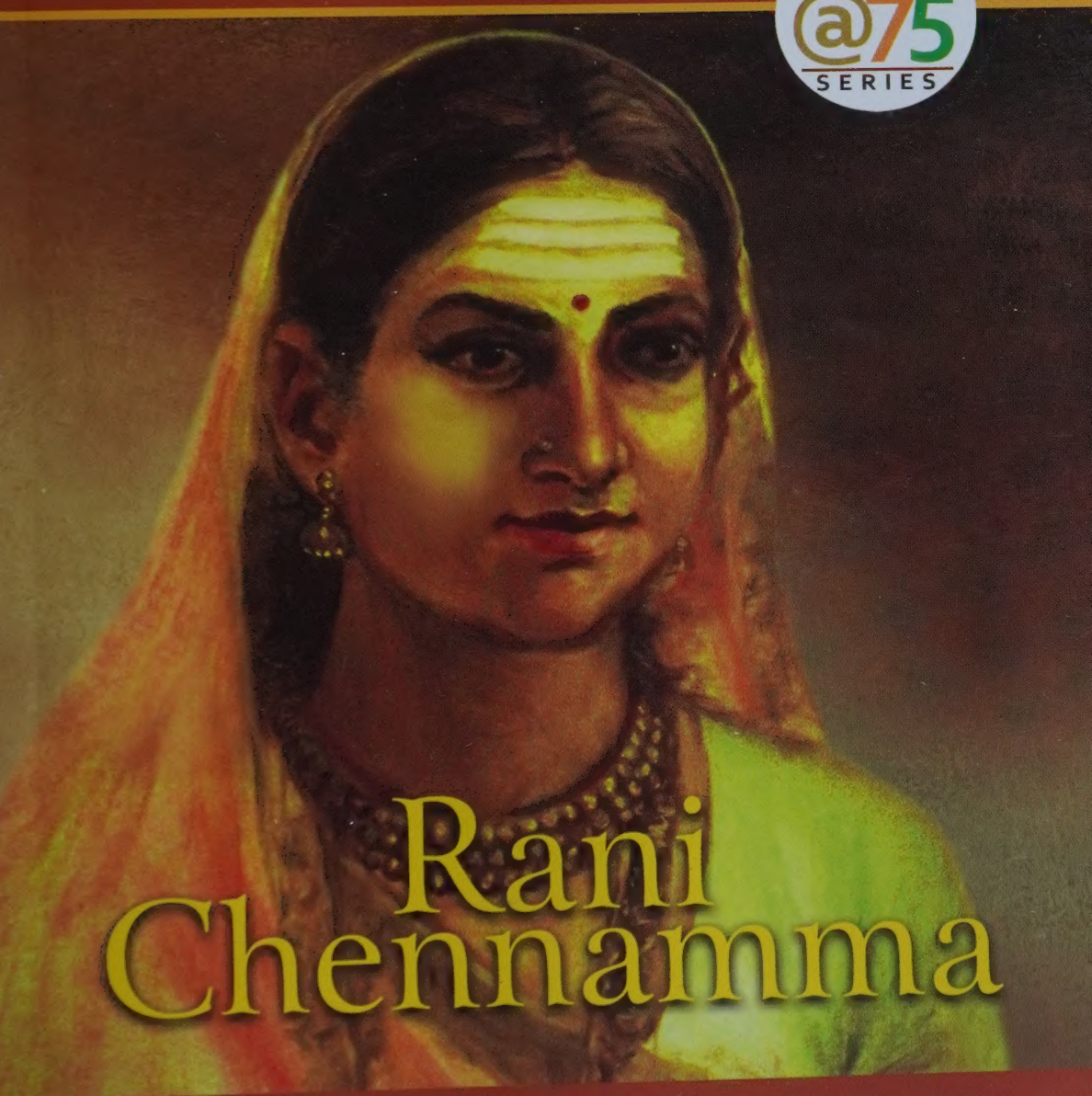

Rani Chennamma

SADASHIVA WODEYAR

Much before the first war of Indian independence in 1857, Karnataka's Kittur saw the rise of India's first woman independence leader, Rani Chennamma, who took on the British Empire. Married to Kittur's ruler, Mallasarja Desai, her personal life proved to be tragic, with her husband passing away in 1816 and her son also meeting an untimely death in 1824. During the last days of the Kittur ruler, Shivalingagaruda Sarja, son of her husband by first queen, Rani Rudramma, a decision was taken to adopt a boy named Shivalingappa as the successor, but the British did not approve of the same. This ultimately resulted in the famous armed rebellion by the Kittur army under Rani Chennamma in October 1824, leading to the historic defeat of the British forces and the killing of the British Collector and political agent. She went on to release the British hostages on the promise that the war won't be continued, but the British treacherously came back with larger forces, leading to the defeat of the Kittur army after great resistance by Rani Chennamma and her warriors. She spent the last five years of her life in the Bailhongala Fort before breathing her last in 1829.

Rani Chennamma

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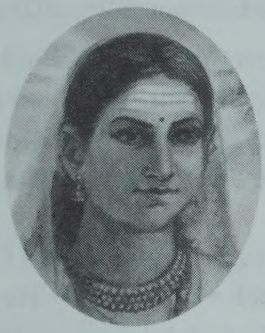

Sadashiva Wodeyar

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INTRODUCTION

Since my early childhood, I had been listening to the heroic tale of Rani Chennamma's valiant fight against the British. Over the years, I continued to read about the history of Kittur from various sources. I sometimes toyed with the idea that I should some day write a comprehensive historical novel or a play dealing with her life. As a fortunate coincidence, in December 1974, I received a letter of request from the National Book Trust, India, to write, unexpectedly, her biography, to be published under their 'National Biography' series. I immediately accepted the invitation and started collecting material about the history of Kittur, Rani Chennamma, etc. I came across a large volume of material, much of it unpublished so far. This included correspondence between the British civil and military

officials at various levels, their correspondence with Rani Chennamma and other renowned personages, most of which are now very well preserved in the archives of the India Office, London, and also other materials in many museums and offices in India. I went through every book or pamphlet so far published on the subject. I have also been able to obtain some unpublished poems, folk-songs and other similar materials. I visited Kittur on a number of occasions, and other places connected with the history of Kittur, to gain first-hand knowledge of any source material which was likely to throw light on the history of Kittur. I also met many of the lineal descendants of the Kittur ruling family and collected information available from them. It has been a very laborious task, but, at the same, it has also been a very exciting one.

After collecting and going through all the material I could gather, I observed that there was scanty record of Rani Chennamma or Kittur history in Indian sources, as very little authentic material, either written at the time of the reign of Chennamma or immediately thereafter, in the nature of historical records, has been left behind or extant. Much of what is found locally is through literary compositions like ballads, folk-songs, poems, plays and other literary compositions, in which obviously liberties have been taken with regard to historical facts and, therefore, there are contradictory accounts of some of the events. The records in India Office, particularly

letters exchanged between the various civil and military officials, have been carefully preserved. They form the main bulwark of the available records on the history of Kittur and the great battle of 1824. There is, therefore, little scope for doubt regarding the authenticity of the events narrated in this biography, as they are corroborated by the letters of the European officers themselves. Only here and there, in an attempt to record events vividly, I have put the needed flesh at appropriate places on these solid bones of history. I have also made liberal use of the valuable material regarding Kittur history in Vol. I of the *History of Freedom Movement in Karnataka* (edited by Dr M. V. Krishna Rao and Prof. G. S. Halappa) published by the Government of Karnataka.

I must herein express my deep appreciation of the substantial research work done by the late Shri Dodda Bhaveppa Moogi who almost made it his life-mission to collect the scattered decaying material of Kittur history by going from village to village, taking down notes, folk-songs, and poems from all possible sources. In writing this biography, I have made liberal use of the material collected by him. This material has been next in importance only to the material I could get from the records of the India Office, London.

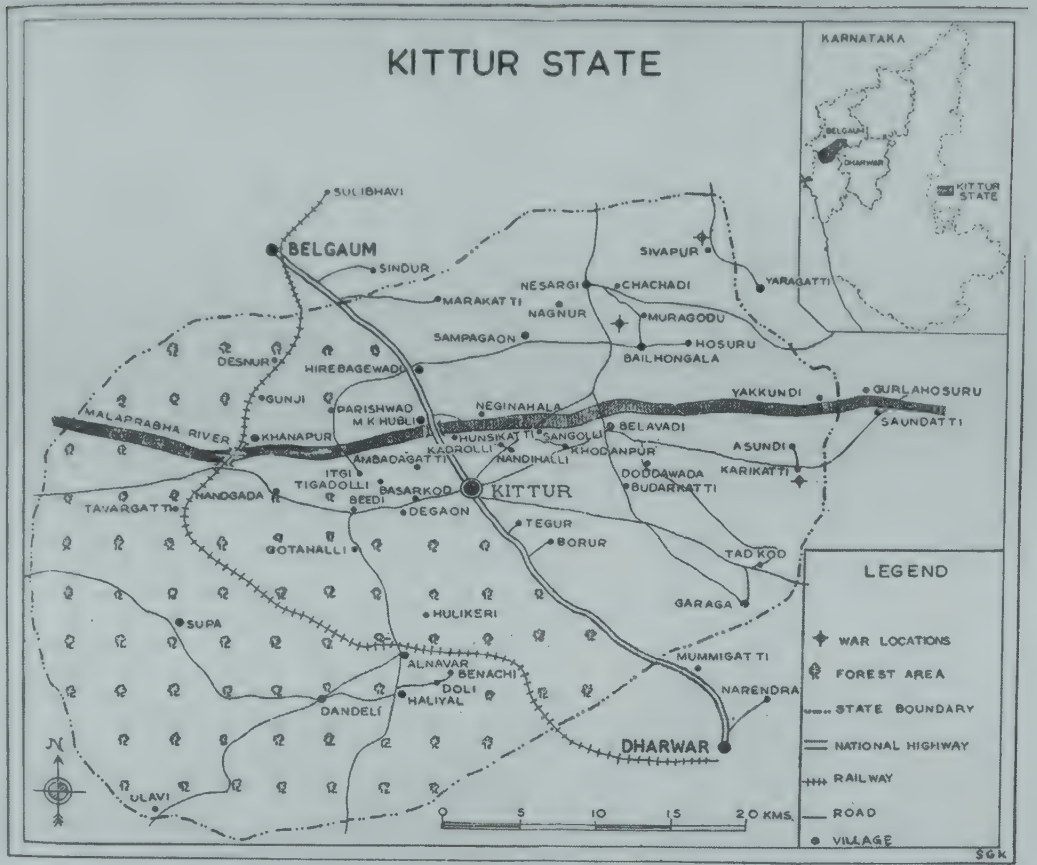
While writing this biography, I received considerable help, guidance and suggestions from Dr A. Sundara of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture of Karnataka University. He went through the script

and made a number of valuable suggestions, many of which I have accepted. While expressing my gratitude for his help and valuable suggestions, I claim full responsibility for any inaccuracies or statements of opinion regarding men and affairs. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr C.R. Yaravintelimath of the Department of English, who went through the script and touched it up from the point of view of language and expression and made some valuable suggestions. The press copy was prepared with the help of Shri G.M. Guddadmath, the stenotypist, Shri S. I. Wadawadgi, my personal assistant and Shri S. S. Navati, the typist. I am thankful to all of them.

The librarian Shri K. S. Deshpande, the deputy librarian Shri S. R. Gunjal, and Director of Kannada Research Institute Dr B. S. Kulkarni, made available to me all the relevant material in their possession to enable me to write this biography. I am also thankful to them.

I am grateful to National Book Trust, India for giving me the opportunity to write this biography which to me has been an exhilarating experience.

2 October, 1976 SADASHIVA SHIVADEVA WODEYAR


KITTUR STATE
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BELGAUM
DHARWAR
KITTUR STATE
SOLIBHAVI
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SINDUR
SIVAPUR
NESARGI
CHACHADI
YARAGATTI
MARAKATTI
NAGNUR
MURAGODU
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1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kittur today is a small town nestling in a cluster of green trees behind a couple of small hillocks, adjoining the Poona (Pune)-Bangalore national highway, almost midway between Belgaum and Dharwar in Karnataka. Not many people outside Karnataka know about the glorious role played by this little town, which was the capital of a small princely state for nearly 164 years, belonging to a Kannada dynasty, which had a continuous history of more than two centuries.

Queen Chennamma of this place was the very first head of a princely state in India to rise against the mighty British empire and hold her own, even though for a brief period. Rani Chennamma, though a queen of a little state, was a woman of indomitable courage and patriotism. She loved the land and her people so

much that she was prepared to sacrifice anything to preserve its freedom. She was endowed with intellectual abilities equal to any emergency, be it a political crisis or a war strategy. She fought against the mighty British army and there was much bloodshed. For once the British floundered before the fierce onslaught and were completely vanquished. This was the first ever victory of an Indian freedom fighter against the mighty British empire. It is an inspiring story which will thrill freedom lovers in any country, at all times. It will be my endeavour to narrate faithfully the story of this brave queen in accordance with evidence and records, based on both history and folk-literature in the hope that future generations will accord due recognition and pay homage to this valiant queen of Kamataka.

Kittur Dynasty

The Kittur dynasty had its early beginnings in 1585. Its founders were Hire-Mallashetty and Chikka Mallashetty from Sagar in Mysore state, who got this territory as a gift from the Adil Shahi kings of Bijapur, whom they served very loyally for a number of years. Both the brothers were brave fighters. Hire-Mallashetty had been conferred the title of 'Shamsher Jung Bahadur' by the Adil Shahi kings. In recognition of their valour and their services, they obtained a grant of the *sar-deshmukhi* of the territory near Hubli (in Dharwar district), which was then known as Hoobly *pargana*, from the Adil Shahi

rulers in the year 1585. Thereafter, they came down and settled at a place called Sampagaon (now in Belgaum district) and made it their capital and reigned over the area then under the Kittur region. The dynasty ruled, in all, for 239 years, from 1585 to 1824.

Early Rulers

During its long history, the most notable among the early rulers was Allappa Gowda Sardesai who ruled over Kittur from 1660 to 1691. He was the fifth ruler of the Kittur dynasty. It was during his regime in the year 1682 that this ruling family settled down in Kittur, which was till then known as Gijagana-halli (weaver-bird village). During his time, the boundaries of this state were extended to include Sampagaon and Beedi districts. He was a brave king and fought against the Bijapur kings to retain his *desgat* (authority or rule). The Kittur fort, the ruins of which can be seen even today, was built during his regime.

The palace, which is now in ruins, still gives an idea of its former splendour. When intact, the main porch was 100 feet (30 metres) long and 30 feet (9 metres) wide. It was supported by mighty teak pillars. The roof was of massive carved teak. The palace had three storeys. There were dining halls, kitchens and bathrooms. The dining hall could accommodate 1,000 people for dinner at a time. There were barracks, stables for horses, elephants and camels. In front of the main palace was

the *sadarkatta*, where people who came to the fort to have an interview with the ruler, could sit and wait for their turn. Allappagouda Sardesai was succeeded by his son, Mudimallappagouda Sardesai, the sixth ruler, who ruled over the state from 1691 upto 1696. He was also known for his valour and the Adil Shahis granted him the titles of 'Shamsher Jung Bahadur' and 'Dilawar Khan Bahadur' — 'Dilawar Jung' for his distinguished services in the battlefield. During this period, the Adil Shahis were defeated by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, who annexed the Bijapur kingdom. He appointed Rauf Khan as the Nawab of Savanuru, in charge of the territory which included the Kittur region. Mudimallappagouda Sardesai made a settlement with Rauf Khan regarding the continuance of the state.

The next important ruler was Shivanagouda Sardesai who ruled over the state from 1717 to 1734. He got many titles and *sanads* from Aurangzeb. After him, came Malava Rudragouda *alias* Fakir Rudra Sarja, who ruled over the state from 1734 to 1749. His queen consort, Rani Mallamma, was a powerful lady and played a prominent part in the affairs of the state. Although in Rani Mallamma, he had a devoted and capable wife, Rudragouda fell in love with an alluring Muslim beauty called Niranjani and married her by converting her to Veerashaivism (Lingayat), which was the religion of the Kittur ruling dynasty. The episode of their love has been sung by poets in a number of ballads and folk-songs. His

brother, Mallappa, vehemently opposed Rudragouda's marriage to Niranjani, but in vain. Infatuated as he was with Niranjani's beauty, Rudragouda built a beautiful palace for her in Deshanur in the northern part of Kittur state and spent most of the time in her company. This palace in Deshanur is known as 'Niranjani Mahal'. Rani Mallamma had, therefore, to take up the reins of the administration of the state. She was, however, equal to the task, and could manage the affairs of the state quite efficiently. Rudragouda also built a fort in Deshanur which has been named after him and called Rudragad.

During his regime, in the year 1746, the Nawab of Savanuru had to cede Kittur along with some other territories to the Marathas, and the Kittur dynasty had to change its allegiance from the Nawab of Savanuru to the Peshwas of Poona. Rudragouda had no male issues, but his late brother, Mallappa, had a son named Veerappagouda. When Rudragouda became old, he had to think about who should succeed him to the Kittur throne. He made up his mind to bring his nephew Veerappagouda to the throne. However, Veerappagouda's mother believed that her husband Mallappa had been murdered at the behest of Rudragouda, and suspected his intentions. She ran away with her son and remained incognito, staying for some time in the *kalmath* at Kittur and for some time at the private residence of a merchant's family in Uppin Betageri. Incidentally, the *kalmath* at Kittur is the seat of *kalmath* Swamis who were the gurus of the Kittur ruling

family. However, on coming to know of the whereabouts of Veerappagouda and his mother, Rudragouda personally went to his sister-in-law and persuaded her to come back to Kittur with her son, as he wished him to succeed to the throne of Kittur. Veerappagouda came to Kittur and was crowned the next ruler of the state to succeed Rudragouda. Rudragouda died a peaceful death after some time and his consort Niranjani also died a little later. Rudragouda and Niranjani were both buried in the precincts of the *kalmath* at Kittur. Their *samadhis* have been well preserved and can be seen even today.

Veerappagouda ruled over the state from 1749 to 1782. It was a long and eventful regime. In the year 1778, Hyder Ali of Mysore, who had conquered the whole country south of the Malaprabha river in the Belgaum district and south of the Krishna river in the Bijapur district, agreed to receive from Kittur Desai his usual tribute or *peshkash (nazarana)* and continue the Kittur *desgat* (rule). He was a brave ruler, and in 1778, he defeated the Patwardhan of Tasgaon, captured Gokak and Savadatti and added them to his *desgat* which already had under its jurisdiction, since 1756, the districts of Parasagad, Sampagaon and Beedi. During this period, there were continuous internecine wars between the Peshwas on the one side, and Hyder Ali on the other, and small states like Kittur had to play into the hands of these warring powers. In 1779, Parashuram Bhau conquered Gokak and took Veerappagouda

Sardesai prisoner. Knowing that Veerappagouda was a brave fighter, and might prove to be a danger to the Peshwa rule, Parashuram Bhau kept him in prison at Miraj, where he died in 1782. His body was brought to Kittur and buried in the precincts of *kalmath.* His tomb has been well looked after and draws many visitors today.

Soon after his death, the family took Mallasarja as the adopted son, and he became the ruler of the state in 1782. Among the twelve rulers of the Kittur dynasty, he was the most illustrious. Chennamma, the heroine of this biography, was his second wife. To understand and appreciate the role played by Kittur Chennamma in the valiant fight launched against the British, it is necessary to be acquainted with the full background and the history of the reign of Mallasarja upto the time of his death in 1816, after which Chennamma assumed the reins of Kittur.

Mallasarja

Mallasarja ruled over Kittur state from 1782 to 1816. Undoubtedly, it was a glorious period from all accounts found in history, ballads and songs composed in his honour. It was the time when foreign powers, like the English, the French and the Portuguese were vying with each other to acquire political supremacy and grab whatever Indian territory each one could. The country was besieged by internal strifes among the small feudal states who played into the hands of the big

foreign powers. Political intrigues were rampant. In the southern part of India, the powerful rulers contending for power were Hyder Ali and later, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, the Peshwas of Maharashtra, the Adil Shahis of Bijapur, and the Nizam of Hyderabad, not to mention the many other small feudal heads and chieftains who were all quarrelling amongst themselves for petty personal gains, indifferent in their greed to the fate of the country as a whole. It was at such a crucial juncture that Mallasarja came to the throne.

In 1785, Tipu seized Kittur, Nargund and Ramadurg in Dharwar and placed a strong Mysore detachment in Kittur. The Marathas forged an offensive alliance with the Nizam against Tipu, and while the main army of the feudatories advanced towards Badami in Bijapur and then Dharwar, Tukoji Holkar and Ganesh Pratap Behere were despatched with 25,000 horses to attack a body of Tipu's troops under Burhanuddin near Kittur and drove his garrisons from that district. Holkar's detachment succeeded in driving out Tipu's troops from every part of Kittur except the fort, which was stormed for more than a month but with no result. Though the balance of advantage in the war leaned towards Tipu, in April 1787 the fear of an English invasion led him to give up Kittur and other places to the Marathas.

In the three years ending with 1787, during which Kittur was under Tipu, his lieutenant Badrul Zaman Khan took the management of Desai's estates or *jagir*

(lands) into his own hands, stripped him of all power and set apart a sum for his support. Later, under the treaty of Srirangapatna, concluded in February 1792, the Maratha frontier was extended to the Tungabhadra and Parasghad, and the Kittur Desai's lands which had been taken over by Tipu, again became part of the Maratha country. These districts were assigned to Parashuram Bhau, who in the late war had been forced to raise troops largely in excess of the number for which Patwardhan's *saranjam* or military grant had been assigned. He placed a *mamlatdar* (court official) in charge of Kittur and made it subordinate to Dharwar, granting an allowance to Desai for his support.

During late June 1800, Dhondu Vaugh, the brave Maratha freebooter came into the Kittur country. On 30 June, 1800, he surprised the Maratha General Dhondu Pant Gokhale near Kittur, attacked his rear guard and forced his whole force to fight. Gokhale was killed, and in fulfilment of a vow made after a defeat in 1791, Dhondu Vaugh dyed his moustaches in Gokhale's blood drawn from the heart. Dhondu remained in Kittur country until General Wellesley's arrival in Dharwar drove him in that direction. On 30 July, 1800, part of Dhondu's army was destroyed at Munoli, 25 miles (38 km) north-east of Kittur, and he retired precipitately in the direction of Kittur, whence he escaped through the neighbouring forest by passing around, along the source of the Malaprabha. General Wellesley in his pursuit

came to Kittur on 5th August and was detained here for six days, making boats in order to cross the Malaprabha which was in full spate.

The relations between the British and the Peshwas were cordial for nearly twenty-five years from the year 1792, when the treaty of Srirangapatna was signed with the Peshwas, accepting British supremacy and becoming abject sycophants. The Kittur Desai had to also fall in line with the Peshwas and show gestures of loyalty and support to the British. In 1802, when General Wellesley was going from Srirangapatna to Poona to reinstate Bajirao Peshwa, several estate holders of the region aided the British forces and, along with others, the Desai of Kittur contributed 100 horses and 100 foot soldiers to fight for the British. Mallasarja also consented to give a small fort at Sangolli to serve as a post to keep open communications and guard the hospital and the boats stationed there. The Kittur contingent, though furnished in a spirit of loyalty, was of little service. They had to receive constant advances to keep them from starving. As a reward for his loyalty in joining the army which was proceeding to reinstate the Peshwa, the Kittur Desai was allowed to continue enjoyment of his estates. At that time, he held the country around Kittur, which yielded a yearly revenue of ₹4 lakh, and kept a force of 1,000 horses and 4,000 foot soldiers. He was paying the Peshwas

a yearly tribute of about ₹ 70,000. Everything was running smoothly with Kittur state enjoying full autonomy in its internal matters and administration.

In 1804, the Peshwas, fearing the growing prosperity and strength of Kittur, proposed to Wellesley that the Raja of Kittur be dethroned and dispossessed of his estates. Wellesley turned down this proposal. The reasons stated by Wellesley for this refusal to implement the Peshwas' proposal are well narrated in his own words in a letter written on 6 May, 1804. This letter throws abundant light on the nature and character of the people of Kittur.

> ... I beg leave to deprecate a contest with him (Raja of Kittur), excepting in a case of very evident necessity in which the whole force of the government can be employed. Like Wynad, Coorg, Ballum, Bendur and Soonda, Kittur is situated in, and immediately to, the eastward of the range of Western Ghats. It is, equally with them, difficult for troops; it is inhabited by a similar race of people and the operations of war in it would possibly be attended with the same losses and disasters . . . the country is situated on a defenceless point of the Company's frontier. The fort of Hullihalli has no garrison because I have been obliged to draw the troops from thence to complete the corps at Goa; and the possession of that fort would give the Raja of Kittur a secure communication and entrance into Canara and Bidnur, both provinces entirely

> defenceless; and the former, upon the resources of which Bombay, Poona and the army depend entirely for subsistence ... These facts, however well-founded, are not known and point out clearly the necessity of avoiding to attempt to dispossess the Raja of Kittur of his country till adequate means can be found to ensure the object and to guard against the modes of annoying us which he has in his power.

In 1809, however, Mallasarja entered into an agreement by which he promised to the Peshwas a yearly tribute of ₹ 1,75,000. In accordance with this agreement, the Desai could keep his estate and also receive certain grants for maintaining the army, etc.

In spite of the help and loyalty the Kittur Desai showed to the Peshwas, the latter were not sympathetic towards the Kittur dynasty. Even a ruler like Mallasarja was not treated properly. He was treacherously taken into custody and kept captive in Poona for a long time by the Peshwas. In prison, he fell ill and his health deteriorated so much that he died soon after his return from there. According to his wishes, Shivalingarudra Sarja had already been taken in adoption earlier, and he succeeded Mallasarja in 1816. Thus ended one of the most glorious regimes of the Kittur dynasty. The achievements of Mallasarja will be narrated briefly in the next chapter.

2 REIGN OF MALLASARJA

The reign of Mallasarja was the most eventful and glorious one among those of the Kittur rulers. It was also the most difficult period in Kittur history. He ruled over the Kittur kingdom for nearly thirty-four years. He was also the most famous and well-known of the Kittur chiefs.

The Kittur state in those days included Sampagaon, Beedi, Kittur, Khanapur, Manoli and Nargund, which are now situated in the districts of Dharwar, Belgaum and north Canara. In all it had 286 villages and seventy-two hamlets, which were grouped into administrative units known as *karyats*. There were fourteen such *karyats* and the administration of the state was efficient. The western part was a hilly tract mostly covered with thick forest; some of the hills, especially to the north of Khanapur,

were high and rugged. The northern boundary of Kittur extended over an area upto 20 km south of Belgaum and the southern boundary extended to an area upto 25 km north of Dharwar. To the west it extended upto Tavargatti and included important towns like Deshanur, Supa, Dandeli and Ulavi in the Malnad region. To the east it extended upto Yakkundi and included Bailhongal, Murugodu, Dodawad, Tadakod, Garaga, etc., these localities being situated on the plains, the entire region used to get heavy rains in the rainy season and the summers were of moderate heat.

Communication was difficult in those days. During the rainy season, villages were cut off by overflowing streams and rivers. The Malaprabha river very often overflowed after the heavy rains and it was difficult to cross it during that period. There were five main roads crossing through Kittur. Two roads went north to Poona and one north-east to Kaladgi and Solapur. Another went south-east to Dharwar and one road went westward to Goa. In spite of the poor state of communication, trade and industry flourished in Kittur. The agricultural products together with well-established trade contacts between the country below the Western Ghats and plateau made it a flourishing trade centre and a prosperous state.

During Mallasarja's regime, industries and commerce thrived and people were happy. Arts and crafts and other cottage industries were encouraged. Sarees, *dhotis* and

various other textile goods and also bangles, etc. were produced in various places in the state. Agricultural implements were manufactured. The important trade centres were Nandgada, Khanapur, Bailhongal, Kittur, Sampagaon and Deshanur. Situated about 65 km to the east of Sahyadri mountains (Western Ghats), the position of Kittur was a commercially strategic one. All articles and products grown or produced in the Konkan region were to pass through Nandgada before they could reach other places. Bailhongal was a flourishing cotton and cloth-producing centre. Sampagaon was a big cotton and textile-producing and marketing centre. Deshanur was also a centre for textiles and jute and had close trade links with the Konkan region. It was a flourishing state where agriculture and industries thrived. The annual revenue of the state was nearly ₹ 3,50,000 and it had its own mint.

Mallasarja was a great lover of fine arts such as drama, dance, folk-songs, literature, etc. He encouraged writers and poets, and many men of letters flocked to his court, received liberal patronage and were highly honoured. Poetry and literature thrived there. Occasionally, renowned poets or artistes gave recitations and performances at his court. References have been found, indicating the names of such poets and *pandits* who were patronised by the king.

Among them were a *pandit* named Kolsi Rangacharya of the Nayyayika school of philosophy and the poets Vengi

Chennabasappa, Mulgund Javali, Shettar Channabasappa, Kashiraja, Vara Rudra Kavi, Manipurada Nilakantharya, Magundi Basava, Shivalinga Sastry, Devarashigihalli Rudragouda, Betigeri Shivalinga Sastry and Amruteshwar who wrote a full length adulatory poem called *Mallendra Milna-sollasa* or *Mallatarangini.* New forms of poetry were experimented upon by enthusiastic poets and a new kind of folk-poetry known as *Dum-dumi* took birth during his period. Many such poems are current even today. They were mostly composed by poets who lived during Mallasarja's regime. *Dum-dumi* is a contribution of Kittur to Kannada literature.

Mallasarja was a great connoisseur of the good things of life. He liked good clothes and his wardrobe included elegant dresses made in different parts of the country. He was also a connoisseur of good food. He enjoyed feeding people with delicacies, some of which were Kittur's speciality. He was also fond of plants, trees and flowers. He had a botanical garden in the village of Devarashigihalli. Thus, it is seen from all accounts that Mallasarja was a great patron of fine arts, handicrafts and literature, philosophy and other finer things of life. People lived a full and happy life during his regime, and were given many opportunities to actively participate in dramas, dances, folk-songs and other communal and cultural activities.

Mallasarja was a highly devout and religious man. He patronised all religious institutions, such as temples,

maths and mosques. It is said that there were 1,000 *maths* in the state. The headquarters of the Veerasaiva *maths* was the *kalmath* at Kittur which was known as *Savira Samsthan Math.* As mentioned earlier, the Swamijis of this *math* were the gurus of the Kittur ruling family for generations.

The Swamijis were learned. Their deep learning and scholarship, their untarnished moral character and, above all, their spiritual and intellectual approach to human problems gave them a pre-eminent position in the court. The *kalmath* Swamijis were trusted advisors of the Kittur rulers. They presided over important cabinet meetings to give advice on many matters. In times of crises, the Kittur rulers rushed to the *kalmath* Swamis for guidance. In war and peace, the Swamijis played a dominant role in the affairs of the state. Although they were mainly preoccupied with their religious, philosophical and scholastic pursuits, they were well-versed in the art of diplomacy and politics, and their advice in political matters was always found to be valuable. They also exerted their influence to see that the rulers and their families led a virtuous life and refrained from vices. The whole royal family held the Swamijis in high esteem. It is, therefore, seen that all the *samadhis* of these rulers are in the precincts of the *kalmath,* where they have been very well-preserved. Therefore, the *kalmath,* which is situated in the heart of Kittur town, is even today a place of pilgrimage for all those interested in the history of Kittur.

The strength of the tradition of Kittur's *kalmath* Swamijis has not declined with the passage of time.

A little outside Kittur town, there is the *choukimath,* an adjunct to the Kittur *kalmath.* In the *choukimath,* there are covered halls which could be guarded on all sides, where secret sessions to discuss important problems of the state in times of crises could be held. There have been many such instances in the history of Kittur when the rulers of Kittur used to confer with the Swamijis in the secret chambers of the *choukimath,* on important diplomatic moves, war strategies, and political manoeuvres.

Mallasarja was hardly seventeen years of age when he assumed the reins of the state. He was bubbling with youthful vigour and enthusiasm and had a magnetic personality. He was himself a brave fighter, trained in horse-riding, sword-lighting, archery and the martial arts.

When he came to the throne, he had to fight in turn against two big powers, the Muslim ruler from Mysore, i.e., Tipu Sultan, and the Peshwas from the north. At the same time, the British were trying to spread their tentacles in the south-western part of India. There was a regular tug-of-war between the Peshwas and Tipu of Mysore, and Mallasarja had, on a number of occasions, to fight with either the Peshwas and their subordinates or Tipu and his vassals. Neither Tipu nor the Peshwas had any interest in Kittur and

its welfare. Their only aim was to ransack and take away whatever booty they could get from this little prosperous state. Inevitably, the Kittur rulers had to, on occasions, take the help of the British to retain the state intact. The prosperity of this small state was itself a curse, as these big powers always had an eye on this territory which they thought could be plundered at will to fill their coffers. It was at such a juncture that Mallasarja came to the throne of Kittur.

Within three years of his assuming the throne, Tipu Sultan, through his assistant Badrul Zaman Khan, tried to capture Deshanur fort situated in the northern part of Kittur. Mallasarja and his army beat them back. It is said that Queen Rudramma, the first wife of Mallasarja, fought in this battle. Tipu Sultan came again after a few months with Burhanuddin for the second attack. The army of this small state could not fight the large trained army of Tipu. Mallasarja was taken captive and kept prisoner in Kapaladurga near Peria-Pattana for nearly three years. At that time he was twenty years of age. Mallasarja very cleverly escaped from the prison and crossed into the territory which was under the British, near Coimbatore, and then went to Bijapur, which was under the Mughals at that time. Then he walked in disguise all the way, passing through a number of places, suffering untold misery, until he reached Babaleshwar where his wife Rudramma's close relatives stayed. They gave him shelter and here

he got news about the developments in Kittur. As soon as the people in Kittur came to know about his escape, they came to Babaleshwar and took him back to Kittur. They organised a grand reception to celebrate his homecoming.

Mallasarja again assumed the reins of the state after a spell of nearly three years.

In 1787, Tipu had to relinquish Kittur to the Marathas, fearing the intervention of the British who had by then become powerful in this part of the country. Thus, Kittur again came under the rule of the Peshwas, who appointed Parashuram Bhau as their subordinate in charge of the southern part, which included Kittur. Bhau made Kittur subordinate to Dharwar and appointed a *mamlatdar* at Kittur to look after its administration. Soon thereafter, Parashuram Bhau died in a battle with the Raja of Kolhapur in 1788, at Pattanakodi, after which Kittur enjoyed full autonomy. Their only chiefs were the Peshwas, to whom the rulers were to pay an annual tribute of about ₹ 70,000. At that time, Mallasarja had under him 1,000 cavalry and 4,000 foot soldiers. The annual income of the state was about 5 lakhs.

In 1792, according to the treaty of Srirangapatna, the northern area of the Tungabhadra was handed over in its entirety to the Peshwas. Even though the Kittur area was under the Peshwas, there were strong and powerful freebooters in the southern part

of the territory who played havoc by defying the Peshwas and plundering small states in the south. One such free-booter was Dhondu Vaugh who was looting and plundering this area. Mallasarja had, therefore, to take the help of the British and he had an agreement with General Wellesley who helped him put down Dhondu Vaugh. In the year 1802, General Wellesley decided to go from Srirangapatna to Poona to reinstate Bajirao. Mallasarja and other Desais of this region contributed handsomely in men and money to help the British. In recognition of the help and good gesture, the British allowed Mallasarja to keep his *desgat*. In 1805, Mallasarja actively helped the Peshwas to fight Tipu, in recognition of which in 1809, the Desai of Kittur could enter into an agreement with the Peshwas that on payment of a tribute of 1.75 lakhs he would be allowed to keep his *desgat* and the right to maintain his army, and was promised full autonomy in administration of the state. In recognition of his strategy, statecraft and tactics displayed at the time of his escape from the Kapaladurga, and his valour in fighting against Tipu, Mallasarja was conferred the title of 'Pratap Rao'. To commemorate this event he built a fort at Nandgada and named it Pratapgad.

The fight put up by Kittur rulers against the Peshwas for maintaining the integrity of the state and autonomy of its administration is noteworthy. The Peshwas and

Patwardhans left no stone unturned to conquer and subjugate them. They did not succeed. The following Marathi extract from the records of 1809 gives evidence of the character of the Kittur chiefs:[1]

> Kittur Desai was a powerful rebel in Karnataka. Although the Peshwa tried for forty years to subjugate and control Kittur, he did not succeed in his effort. But as the tug-of-war for power continued between the British and the Peshwas, the Kittur Desai enjoyed full autonomy and status. Mallasarja's benevolent rule made it very prosperous and the people were happy. Things were running smoothly in Kittur upto 1821, when events took a sudden turn. Bajirao was getting reports regarding the prosperity and the increasing wealth of the state. He became avaricious and jealous of the popularity of Mallasarja. There were cunning self-seekers in Kittur who carried tales to Bajirao that Mallasarja was becoming very powerful and defiant and that he may not hesitate to defy the Peshwas at any time. Bajirao believed their stories. He wanted to weaken and humiliate Mallasarja. On the pretext of a pilgrimage to Sandur, to worship Lord Kartikeya, their family deity, Baijirao arranged a sojourn in the south. He had with him his big entourage of army and cavalry, etc. He would halt at places and send for the subordinate chiefs and the Desais under him,

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[1] Kare, V. V.; *Historical Marathi Records*, Vol. XV, pp. 8054, ed. V.V. Khare, Bharatiya Itihasa Mandai, Poona.

who were expected to come and meet him with lavish gifts. Message was sent to Mallasarja to meet Bajirao at Hongal. Mallasarja was reluctant. One Allappa Gowda of Shegunashi, who was a very cunning man, persuaded Mallasarja to go and meet the Peshwa. Bajirao purposely left the place before Mallasarja could reach there, and left word that Mallasarja should follow him to Poona. As soon as Mallasarja reached Poona, he was taken captive and kept in the Mudholkar *zuada*, and a strong guard was kept to guard the place. He was detained and ill-treated for a long period of three years, during which Mallasarja's health deteriorated considerably. Mallasarja was a self-respecting man. He refused small favours from Bajirao. He desired to be treated as an equal and he wanted full autonomy for his state. He refused to accept anything short of this from Bajirao, who wanted to humiliate him and make him agree to the terms which would deprive the state of its independence. Mallasarja chose to starve and die rather than agree to the humiliating conditions. Mallasarja's health deteriorated so much that it looked as though he was going to die very soon. Therefore Bajirao, fearing the consequences, decided to release him. At last, he was released and arrangements were made to send him in a covered chariot. The news about his departure from Poona was sent to the members of his family. They knew that Mallasarja was very weak. They were naturally anxious about the condition of his health. The entire family and the trusted lieutenants

of the court came to Arabhavi *Math* at Duradundi, where they received a sick and skeletal Mallasarja. From there, they carefully brought him to Kittur in a semiconscious state. As the party entered Kittur, thirty-four guns boomed to mark the completion of thirty-four years' glorious rule of Mallasarja. Mallasarja asked his people what it was about. He was told that they were celebrating his homecoming. He was not in a condition to get up. He died three or four days later, leaving his two wives, Rudramma and Chennamma, and a son, Shivalingarudra Sarja. Thus ended the most glorious reign of Mallasarja. His eldest son Shivalingarudra Sarja, popularly known as Bapu Saheb, succeeded him.

3 PERIOD OF DECADENCE

Shivalingarudra Sarja *alias* Bapu Saheb was a poor successor to Mallasarja. His health was poor and he was more interested in literary pursuits. He wrote three books in Kannada. His wife Veeramma came from a respectable family of the Desais of Shivagutti, which was also known as Shamshedabad. It is said that he brought one Ganiga Chennabasappa, a Nayyayaka scholar from Mysore, and studied philosophy under him and became well versed in religion and philosophy. He was still young and inexperienced and was surrounded by unscrupulous sychophants and flatterers. There were groups among the officers in the court: one group was headed by Sardar Gurusiddappa, who completely identified himself with and owed complete allegiance to Rani Chennamma,

the other group of disgruntled self-seekers was led by Venkatrao and Mallappa Shetty, who were interested in weakening the government for their own selfish ends and were without scruples. They had contacts with British officers and leaked official secrets to them about the affairs of the state. The British were only too willing, nay, and eager, to know about the affairs of Kittur which they wanted to grab on some pretext or the other. Young Shivalingarudra Sarja fell an easy victim to the wiles of Venkatrao and Mallappa Shetty who were on the payroll of the British and were prepared to sell Kittur for petty personal gains.

Shivalingarudra Sarja assumed the reins of the *desgat* in 1816. In 1817 and 1818, the affairs between the English and Bajirao Peshwa came to a crisis. There was an open rift between them and the British were keen on vanquishing the Peshwa once and for all so that he would not hinder their expansionist plans. The British started their attack on the Peshwas from the south. In November 1817, Elphinstone, Commissioner of Deccan, wrote a letter to the Desai of Kittur, seeking help and support in the event of a fight against the Peshwas. In 1818, the British attacked the Belgaum fort which was under the Peshwas and during the siege which lasted from 21 March to 12 April, 1818, the Kittur Desai, Shivalingarudra Sarja helped the British with men and material. By 12th April, the Peshwas were completely routed and the Belgaum fort was

taken over by the British. Thus, the Peshwa territory, south of Belgaum, including Kittur, came under the British rule.

Soon thereafter, Shivalingarudra Sarja was sent for by Thomas Munro, Commissioner of Dharwar, and he was made to enter into an agreement on 28 July, 1818, under which the Kittur Desai could retain the territory which they were ruling on payment of a yearly tribute of ₹ 1,75,000. However, under the agreement, he was asked to hand over Khanapur *taluka* to the British to enable them to keep their army and maintain it from that income. They, however, assured them that the Kittur rulers would be treated honourably and there would be no interference in the internal administration of the state so long as they did not do anything which would harm the interests of the British.

This condition, the surrender of Khanapur to the British, was a humiliating one. It also deprived the state of its strategic advantage and a substantial part of its income. Rani Chennamma was extremely unhappy about this. She was helpless. She conferred with His Holiness, the Swamiji of *kalmath,* and after a good deal of discussion and deliberation, they came to the conclusion that it was much better to watch the developments carefully and wait for a more propitious time to defy the new rulers. She believed in the adage that discretion is the better part of valour and decided to bide her time. At that moment she felt helpless,

and she concentrated her energies on patching up the differences between the rival groups in the court. She used to give tender advice to Shivalingarudra Sarja in dealing with the affairs of the state. She tried to infuse patriotic feelings, courage and confidence in him. The British, in turn, were watching the developments in Kittur and waiting for a suitable opportunity to interfere in its affairs. Rani Chennamma's restraint and clever strategy precluded any such possibility.

As days passed, Rani Chennamma assumed more and more control over the affairs of the state till she was virtually its ruler. She had youth, courage and sagacity. She was charming, robust and good looking. She was well-versed in sword-fighting, horse-riding, archery and statecraft. In the court she presided over the meetings with great dignity and ability. She could take quick decisions, and her decisions were timely and in the best interests of the state. Kittur again started flourishing and becoming strong and prosperous. Rani Chennamma's fame spread far and wide. She maintained her fighting forces in an excellent battle ready condition.

The British, whose headquarter was at Dharwar, only about 40 km from Kittur, began to feel restless. They were afraid of the growing strength of this small state which was the most prosperous among the southern states. They even suspected that if it was not subjugated, it may encourage the rulers of Kittur and

other Deccan principalities to make a common cause and organise in a group, thus posing a formidable challenge to their military strength.

In 1822, Thackeray, Principal Collector of Dharwar, wrote a letter to the ruler of Kittur alleging that the state was giving shelter to thugs and robbers and therefore the tranquillity and peace in the area was getting disturbed. He threatened to take serious note of these and warned of serious consequences. These allegations were baseless and flimsy and it was evident that the British only wanted some pretext to grab Kittur. Wiser counsel, however, prevailed and the proposed intervention was stopped. The British were afraid that any attempt to interfere in the affairs of Kittur on such flimsy grounds may result in the rallying of the Deccan chiefs against them. They, therefore, bided their time, ever alert to seek a plausible reason for justifying their interference in its affairs.

For some time, no untoward events perturbed life in Kittur. The people were happy. Trade and commerce were flourishing. The administration was efficient. The army was kept vigilant to meet any eventuality. The differences between rival groups had subsided and Rani Chennamma was in full and firm control of the affairs of the state. Shivalingarudra Sarja, whose health was fast deteriorating as he was suffering from consumption, was functioning only as a nominal head of the state.

He was bed-ridden and was languishing to death. He died in September 1824 after a rule of about eight years. Rani Chennamma assumed full control and became the queen of Kittur.

4

RANI CHENNAMMA

Mallasarja, a detailed account of whose glorious regime is given in the second chapter, had two wives, Rudramma and Chennamma. Rudramma, the first wife, came from the famous Desai family of Tallur, the descendants of which family are still there. She was herself a brave lady, well versed in the art of warfare. There are several references in historical records and writings to confirm that she personally took part in the fight against Tipu Sultan in the battle of Deshanur where Tipu's army was vanquished and driven back. She was brought up and educated by her family in the highest traditions of such Desai families. She knew Urdu and Persian and helped Mallasarja in his official correspondence. Most of the letters exchanged between Mallasarja and Tipu Sultan were drafted by her. Chennamma was Mallasarja's

second wife. If Mallasarja was happy with his talented first wife Rudramma, one may ask why he married a second time. The episode of Mallasarja's first encounter with Chennamma which led to their marriage has been described in a number of poems and folk-songs.

Legend has it that Raja Mallasarja Desai of Kittur met Chennamma under dramatic circumstances. Mallasarja was almost an unacknowledged leader of the small group of patriotic chiefs of the Deccan states. He was deeply worried about the incessant battles between Tipu and the Peshwas, which rendered the plight of the smaller states most uncertain and miserable. Moreover, the constant battles among these powerful rivals enabled the foreign invaders, especially the British, to make capital out of this unfortunate situation, and by weakening both, to play the game of divide and dispossess. Mallasarja, who was a devoted patriot, could not reconcile himself to the British becoming more powerful and he was saddened to see the big powers, like the Peshwas and Tipu, falling prey to British wiles. He wanted to organise all the Desais and chiefs, including the Raja of Kolhapur, into a well-knit united group which would be a force to reckon with, to fight the British. He wanted to do this quietly but effectively, without giving any clue to the British about his intentions. He, therefore, went on a tour to meet all the Desais and chiefs of the Deccan states in whom he had confidence. On one such tour, he visited Kakati, a small *desgat* in Belgaum district. Its

ruler Dhulappagouda Desai, was a powerful figure in the northern part of Karnataka. Kakati was at that time in Sangli state. He halted at a place near Kakati and sent word to Dhulappagouda Desai about his intention to meet him, and waited for a reply from the Desai. He halted for about a day in this place.

It was reported by the villagers that a man-eating tiger was prowling in the area and had created panic and anxiety among the farmers. They requested Mallasarja to kill the tiger and save them from its menace, so Mallasarja who was a skilled hunter, set out into the forest with his small group of attendants. They were ultimately able to spot the tiger. Mallasarja took aim and brought down the ferocious animal with a single arrow. When he reached the spot where the slain tiger lay, he found, to his great surprise, by its side a fully armed maiden who claimed the dead tiger, and who was quite angry with the stranger for having interfered with her sport. Mallasarja looked at this robust, good-looking damsel who looked every inch a queen. Chennamma, then, was in the prime of her youth. This daughter of Dhulappagouda Desai and Padmavati was born in the year 1778, and was at that time twenty-two years of age. She was beautiful and agile.

Mallasarja's gaze held this comely maiden and he was struck by her youth and beauty. He then looked at the tiger. It had two arrows in its body and the maiden claimed that it was her arrow which had brought down

the animal. Needless to say, the Raja was overcome by her beauty and courage, and lost his heart to her. On coming to know that she was the daughter of Dhulappagouda Desai, he felt extremely happy. He told her about his intention to see her father. He allowed the dead tiger to be taken by Chennamma and showered praises on her for her bravery. Chennamma shyly accepted the compliments and was very happy to learn from him that he was to come to their house the next day. Mallasarja, who was an extremely handsome man, had also cast a spell on Chennamma; she was struck by his magnetic personality. She took leave of him, saying that she would be extremely happy to receive him in their house.

The next day, when Mallasarja went to Dhulappagouda Desai's house, he first talked to him about his plans to unite all the Desais of the Deccan states in the interest of their survival and for preparing themselves to face any eventuality of fighting the foreign invaders, like the British, the Portuguese and the French. After that he told him of the chance meeting he had with his daughter Chennamma and hinted about his intention to marry her. Dhulappagouda Desai was naturally delighted at this splendid prospect. Chennamma again met Mallasarja in their *wada* when Mallasarja told her about his first marriage with Rudramma, who was a very brave and talented lady. Chennamma did not mind this. She was prepared to be his second wife.

In those days polygamy was very common among the royal families. She promised Mallasarja that she would regard the elder queen as her own elder sister, and adjust with her, and that she would never make her unhappy. Soon thereafter, the marriage was solemnised at Kakati and when Mallasarja returned to Kittur he had with him by his side, his brave, clever, and lovely second wife, Chennamma.

In the years that followed, she conscientiously kept her word. She loved Rudramma like her own elder sister and showered on her sons, Shivalingarudra Sarja *(alias* Bapu Saheb) and Veerarudra Sarja *(alias* Baba Saheb), the same affection as she showered on her own son Shivabasvaraj *(alias* Bala Saheb). She looked upon all the three with the same affection and love.

Chennamma was very keen that Rani Rudramma's son Shivalingarudra Sarja should succeed Mallasarja. She herself suggested this. Even fate conspired to fulfil her wishes. Her own son Shivabasavaraj died early, after a brief illness. Veerarudra Sarja also died within a few years. Shivalingarudra Sarja, the son of Rudramma, survived as the only claimant to the throne of Kittur after Mallasarja.

Rani Rudramma, as has already been said, was a woman of learning and scholarship. She was becoming more and more interested in religion and philosophy. She gradually retired from public life and started to spend more time in her religious pursuits. The Swamiji

of *kalmath* used to give discourses and read epics and other religious classics to her. She had a small house built for her at Sangolli, on the banks of the Malaprabha, where she could concentrate on her *pooja* and religious pursuits. She started spending more and more time in reading and worship, leaving the affairs of the state to be looked after by Chennamma, who willingly accepted more and more responsibilities in the household as well as the affairs of the state.

Chennamma was deeply interested in statecraft. She could not tolerate injustice and cruelty. It was this quality which endeared her to her husband and the people. She began to assist her husband in the administration of the state, which was being pulled hither and thither in a tug-of-war between the contending mights of the Marathas and the British. Chennamma, thus, became actively involved in the political affairs of the region. She accompanied Mallasarja in all his expeditions and battles. She sat with him in the court when he deliberated on official matters. She was, in every sense, a friend, philosopher and guide to her husband. It was, therefore, not surprising that after his death, political power was naturally transferred to her and she could assume control of the affairs of the state without any difficulty. She closely watched and studied all movements and developments in the political field. She was intelligent and had a keen grasp of the prevailing political conditions. Gifted with courage and foresight,

she loved the people and freely mixed with them. She knew about their problems and sufferings, and could feel their pulse. She could take decisions on the spur of the moment. She did her utmost to help the poor and the needy. She was always in close touch with her army and her military leaders; she was quick to appreciate acts of bravery and rewarded brave soldiers with generous gifts. Chennamma thus steered the ship of the state smoothly for eight years after Mallasarja's death, keeping Shivalingarudra Sarja as the nominal head.

5 THE QUESTION OF ADOPTION

The British continued to wait for an opportunity to interfere in the affairs of Kittur and finally annex it. They were watching closely all the developments in the state. Shivalingarudra Sarja had for a long time been keeping indifferent health and was more or less a nominal head. It was Rani Chennamma who was virtually ruling the state. Thackeray, the chief political agent and Collector of Dharwar, visited Kittur on 18 May, 1824, on the pretext of meeting the ailing Shivalingarudra Sarja. The agent carried some medicine and during this visit he spent some time with Shivalingarudra Sarja and discussed with him matters regarding Kittur's problems. At this meeting, Shivalingarudra Sarja did not mention anything about his intention to take a son in adoption, although the

thought was present in his mind. Both his brothers had died young and he himself had no issue. The question as to who should succeed him in the event of his death was worrying him. However, he was discreet and did not broach the subject of adoption to Thackeray.

Shivalingarudra Sarja's health continued to deteriorate and in the month of June his condition became so bad that he sent for his confidential assistants and confided in them about his intention to adopt some boy. Among those present at this meeting were Kannur Mallappa, Kannur Veerappa, Subedar Mallappa and Sardar Gurusiddappa. Shivalingarudra Sarja asked Gurusiddappa to go to Sindholi, Marakatti, Khodanpur and Mastamaradi in Shahapur *taluka,* and Subedar Mallappa to go to Chikkos in Murgod *taluka.* Their mission was to bring some four or five young boys belonging to the families of his close relatives so that out of them he could finally choose a successor. Accordingly, Gurusiddappa went to Sindholi and Mastmaradi and brought with him four boys. Subedar Mallappa could not bring anyone with him as all the children of close relatives were sufficiently advanced in age. Of the four boys brought by Gurusiddappa, Shivalingarudra Sarja finally selected Shivalingappa, son of Balappagouda of Mastamaradi. The boy who was finally chosen, it appears, was healthy, agile and bright looking. He said that he would give the final approval for the adoption ceremony when he felt that his end was near. He addressed a letter to Balappagouda of Mastmaradi

about his intention to adopt the boy. The following is the English translation of the letter written in Marathi.

> I have no children of my own. We have decided to get your son Shivalingappa here and adopt him as our son. My health is not good. So you are required to bring your son as soon as you receive this letter. We shall adopt him with the insignia of the royalty and hand over the *samsthan* to him. You are a near claimant among our brothers.*[2]

He took some of his close relatives in confidence in a meeting, as he did not want his intention of adopting this boy to be made public, for there were factions in the court and there were many persons aspiring to give their children in adoption. He was afraid of intrigues among the different groups. He led this boy by his hand and told them all, "I think this boy is a suitable successor to me in all respects. I, therefore, desire that he should succeed me and I beseech your consent and approval." The relatives who were present, and the confidential associates consented to this. The boy was finally brought over to live with the family in the Kittur palace and get initiated into administrative affairs. However, again in the first week of July, Shivalingarudra Sarja's health deteriorated rapidly, causing much anxiety. On

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[2] A photostat copy of this letter in Marathi is published in *History of Freedom Movement in Kamataka*, Vol. I, Government of Karnataka, 1962.

10 July, 1824, Shivalingarudra Sarja drafted a detailed letter to Thackeray, unequivocally expressing his desire to take Shivalingappa in adoption. The text of the letter reads as follows:

> Being extremely ill and reduced, I feel desirous to appoint an heir to the *samsthan* and have, to this end, appointed and confirmed by seal, Mallasarja (the original name of the adopted son was Shivalingappa of Mastmaradi) as the Sir-Desai, Sir-Deshphande and Nadagouda of Hoobly, the Sir-Desai and Sir-Deshpande of Azumnagar Suruff, Khanapur, Suruff Chandgad, Suruff Supa, etc., etc., to the *samsthan*.
>
> It rests with you, therefore, in your goodness to continue with him in the *samsthan* which has been enjoyed by my ancestors and myself by your liberality.

However, Shivalingarudra Sarja's health improved somewhat and, therefore, this letter was not immediately sent to Thackeray. For nearly two months after that he was keeping fairly good health, until again in the first week of September his condition began to deteriorate. On 11 September, 1824, his condition became precarious and he felt that his end was near. That afternoon at about 2 p.m., he sent for his Sardars and other assistants and finally gave orders to perform the adoption ceremony. Accordingly, the boy was brought and after the preliminary ceremony like *mangala snana,* he was

decorated with the *sika*, the insignia of Desaiship. He was named 'Sawai Mallasarja', and invested with the sovereign power over Kittur as the legal successor.*[3]

Rani Chennamma was anxious about the future of Kittur. She had suspicions about the evil designs of Thackeray and also about the intrigues of some of her court assistants, like Kannur Mallappa. She wanted to avoid any possibility of interference by Thackeray in the affairs of Kittur. She sent for all the important leaders and Sardars, like Kannur Mallappa, Sardar Mallappa Shetty, Gurusiddappa, Himmat Singh, Narsing Rao, Guruputra Veerappa, etc., and appealed to them to sink their differences, to show undivided loyalty and to give unstinted support and assistance to the state in this hour of crisis. Her fervent appeal evoked spontaneous response from almost everyone. They pledged their whole-hearted loyalty to the state and participated in the adoption ceremony. However, it appears that Kannur Mallappa and Venkata Rao, who actually participated in the ceremony and also pledged support, had sinister intentions at the back of their minds. Rani Chennamma, as a gesture of confidence, handed over the letter written by Shivalingarudra Sarja to Kannur Mallappa and asked him to proceed to Dharwar along with Sardar Mallappa to deliver the letter to Thackeray.

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[3] The description of the ceremony is found in a letter, written in Marathi, in the private archives of Shri Bhaveppa Moogi, Bailhongal.

She hoped that in this hour of crisis they would remain loyal to Kittur and support the continuance of the *desgat* after the adoption which had taken place that afternoon. Shivalingarudra Sarja survived for about twelve hours after the event. He died in early September 1824. The letter which was carried by Kannur Mallappa and Sardar Mallappa was delivered to Thackeray on the 12th morning. Thackeray suspected the bonafides of the letter as it was dated 10 July, 1824. He thought that the letter must have been a forged one, or must have been got signed by Shivalingarudra Sarja after he had been unconscious by the interested persons with a view to retaining power over the state. He immediately sent for the civil surgeon at Dharwar, Dr G.H. Bell, and asked him to proceed to Kittur and ascertain the condition of the Desai. Accordingly, Dr Bell went to Kittur and on his return reported to Thackeray what he saw there. This report, dated 12 September, 1824, reads as follows:

From G.H. Bell Esq., 12th September, 1824
First surgeon at Dharwar

To
Thackeray Esq.,
Political Agent at Dharwar

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that I went to Kittur as desired by you on the 12th instant to visit the Desai. About two miles (3 km) from Kittur, I was met by a sawar who informed me that the Raja was dead.

As, however, I thought desirable that I should be able to inform you of the state in which I might find the corpse, I proceeded to Kittur. On my arrival (at 3 p.m.) I requested that I might be shown the Raja's body. I found it laid out in state in the open *deezvan khurree* and bedecked in all imaginable finery. I could not ascertain if there was any putrient smell arising from the corpse, but I should think from its appearance and from the time it must have taken to dress, remove and lay out in the manner in which I found it, that death must have taken place sometime before my arrival. The courtyard of the mahal was crowded with natives and there seemed to be free admission to the inhabitants to view the corpse.

I have, etc.

Dharwar
12th Sept., 1824

Sd/ G.H. Bell
First Surgeon, Dharwar

The 'discrepancy' in the date mentioned in the letter of Shivalingarudra Sarja was a sufficient excuse for Thackeray to start a probe into the veracity of the contents of the letter. The agent grasped this opportunity. Within two days of the death of Shivalingarudra Sarja, i.e. on the 14th of September, he proceeded to Kittur and ransacked the palace, intimidated the officials and the members of the royal family and did everything possible to prepare grounds for the annexation of Kittur to the British throne. The detailed letter reproduced below, which he

addressed on the very day to Chaplin, Commissioner of the Deccan, shows clearly the working of his mind and also the steps he took to fulfil this long cherished desire:

Sir,*[4]

One of the principal servants of Kittur named Kannur Mallashetty came to me about noon on the 12th instant to say that his master was dying and to deliver a letter, of which I submit a copy, announcing the adoption of a son; the letter, is dated the 10th July, and mentions that the adoption had then taken place.

2. Mallappa stated that when he left Kittur on the 12th instant the Desai was insensible, but that the ceremony of adoption was performed on the morning of that day and that a salute was afterwards fired in honour of the event.

3. Having heard many reports regarding the Desai's death, and having every reason to believe that no regular adoption had taken place, I asked Mallappa whether it was not desirable that the civil surgeon should visit his master and on his assenting, I requested Mr Bell to proceed to Kittur. That gentleman immediately did so, but found that the Chief had already expired, and from the appearance of the corpse, there is every reason to conclude that death had taken place before Mallappa left Kittur. Even, therefore, if the Desai had applied for and

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[4] The above letter is a crude rendering into English by an assistant in the office of Mr Thackeray, Collector of Dharwar.

obtained leave to adopt, there would have been the strongest grounds to doubt whether he had availed himself of the permission.

4. On my return from Colapur (Kolhapur) in May, the Desai requested that I should send him medicine and pay him a visit to Kittur on my way to Dharwar. I complied with the request and had a long conversation with him on 18th May but, although he was dangerously ill and spoke very freely of his affairs, he was entirely silent on the subject of adoption.
5. Hearing of the intrigues of the Desai's servants, and thinking it probable that they might in the event of their master's death allege that he had failed to apply to the government for permission to adopt, merely from ignorance of the proclamation on the subject, I took occasion, about six weeks ago, to have this proclamation repeated with several others in the presence of the *vakils* of the different chiefs so that they might all be fully aware of the measures necessary to legalise adoption.
6. After the Desai's death I reminded his head servant of the circumstances and asked him how he could reconcile his assertion as to the time of the adoption with the date of the letter announcing it. Mallappa did not attempt to explain this contradiction, and from all I have heard, it is evident that although the deceased might have been much importuned by his interested servants, he never consented to the adoption even in his weakened moments, that he

never intended to apply for permission to adopt, and that if the ceremony of adoption took place at all, it was not performed until the Desai was either dead or quite insensible.

7. The child alluded to in the letter is a very distant collateral relation of the late Chief, and it does not appear that either he or any other of the Desai's relations has a right to succeed on the score of descent, to the newly elected *samsthan* of Kittur. The boy in question is said to have been selected and introduced into the *gaudy* for the purpose of adoption, but for the reasons already stated, it seems evident that this was a manoeuvre of the Desai's servants whose only object was to perpetuate their own influence. It is to be remarked that the Desai's signature in the outdated letter is scarcely legible, and that the characters are quite different from the usual handwriting,which was remarkably good and distinct.

8. The family of the deceased consists of his widow whose age is only eleven years, his step-mother and the widow of his brother who is about sixteen. The rest of the relations are descended from collateral branches so remote that I have not yet been able to trace the common ancestor; whatever, therefore, be the decision of the government regarding the succession, if the estate be not resumed, a long minority must occur, and I trust you will approve of my having proceeded to Kittur in order to make local enquiries respecting the adoption, and to take

measures for securing tranquillity and preventing abuse.

9. In the first place, it seemed expedient to summon all the Sardars and heads of departments and after they have acknowledged their responsibility, to inform them, that as the adoption appeared illegal and as the Desai's widow was a minor, the subject of the succession would be referred to the government and that in the meantime, it would be in my care to preserve order, to protect the country, and to see that every man performed his duty according to *niamool*.
10. Hearing many different and no satisfactory account of the state of the treasury, I consulted the principal members and servants of the family on this subject. They stated that the Desai was entirely his own cash-keeper, that he wrote his own accounts and trusted no one with his treasure, and as their information was extremely unsatisfactory, it appeared desirable that no time should be lost in examining the cash accounts and in sealing up the treasury so that the whole might remain in deposit, pending a reference on the subject.
11. I, therefore, requested Messrs Stevenson and Frere, who came with me, to accompany principal servants to the treasury and to see the whole secured in their presence under the late Desai's seal as well as my own. This measures been adopted and from what I have since heard, I am convinced that it has prevented much plunder.

It did not appear necessary to count the treasury, and the locks of some of the chests did not obey the keys, but from the Maratha memoranda in the Desai's own hand, which were found in the boxes that were not opened, it is probable that the treasure contains about eight or nine lakhs of rupees.

12. Report says that there are hidden treasures, a large amount which were hoarded in the time of former Desais, but the principal servants affirm that no credit is due to this report and that Mallappa, the late Desai's father, when at Poona a few years ago, expended twenty-five lakhs of rupees.
13. With respect to the characters of the late Desai's servants, they are probably as respectable as those usually found in similar situations, but as they have not produced a single account that is satisfactory, as they have endeavoured in some instances to deceive me and as the affairs of the estate would not be safe if left exclusively in their hands, I propose for the present to conduct the administration by means of two joint managers, one on the part of government and the other on that of Desai's family. This arrangement will enable me to check abuses and preserve order without interfering in the usages of the country and the customary system of management.
14. A large balance of last year's *pesheesh* is still due, but this can be realised at any time from the cash in deposit.

15. With regard to the claims of the family, I have not yet succeeded in procuring a satisfactory account of the pedigree, but from all I can learn it appears that as he has left no sons or brothers, his widow is the only person who can be considered in any respect as his heir and in order that it may be decided whether the terms of *sannad* extended to her, I submit copy of the article which relates to the succession.
16. I hope very soon to send you a genealogical account of the family. In the time of the deceased Desai's father, about all the relations who had any pretensions to a share of the estate, are said to have been put to death and the collateral branches that remain appear to be so remote that I doubt whether any of them could succeed, even had the *samsthan* of Kittur existed as an independent state during the time of the common ancestor.

Camp Kittur
14th Sept.,1824

I have, etc.
J. Thackeray

From a careful reading of Mr Thackeray's letter to Mr Chaplin, it can be easily seen that the political agent was keen on finding excuses to annex the state of Kittur. It is also evident that he was aware of the possibility of the Desai taking a boy in adoption, which is clear from the statement in paragraph 5 of the letter. The letter further reveals that he was avaricious about the wealth of the state, which made him suspect the people around the court who might in his opinion pilfer its wealth.

Although he knew that Chennamma was a capable lady and was ably managing state affairs, he wanted to make a pretence of safeguarding the interests of the state and of the widows.

There is also a cunning insinuation in paragraph 8 in his reference to Chennamma as the stepmother of Shivalingarudra Sarja. It is intended to insinuate that there were differences among the members of the family themselves. The tenor of the letter betrays an indecent anxiety to take over the management of the state on any pretext. The points made out and the doubts raised in the letter are of hypothetical nature. Briefly, his contentions were:

1. That the Desai had no plan for adopting a son. This is a blatant lie, for although the Desai did not express any such thought to him during his meeting in May, later he did come to know about it from the statements made by Kannur Mallappa and Sardar Mallapa when they were interrogated by Mr Thackeray himself.
2. His second contention was that no adoption took place at the instance of the Desai. But there is sufficient evidence to show that the adoption did take place as desired by the Desai and he himself did adopt the boy. Even the details of the ceremony have been described by an eye-witness in a Marathi letter. It appears from his letter that he could have known this truth if he had tried more patiently, but he was too eager to suspect regular adoption.

3. His third contention was that even if the adoption took place it was not legal as previous permission was not obtained. But the Kittur Desais enjoyed full autonomy regarding internal matters and there was no need for them to take any such permission.

In their own family history, after Veerappagouda Sirdesai's death in exile at Miraj, his wife Parvatevva, adopted Mallasarja as his successor. Although the Kittur Desais, at that time, were subordinate to the Peshwas, they did not take any permission from the Peshwas to take Mallasarja in adoption. Kittur Desais had entered into covenant with Sir Thomas Munro in 1818, under which the *desgat* had been continued to the Kittur rulers on the same conditions as existed between the Peshwas and the Kittur Desais. There was nothing in this covenant binding the rulers of Kittur to seek permission for adoption of a successor. Even as late as 1854, the East India Company did not introduce any provision prohibiting any widow of state royalty from taking a son in adoption or restricting the adoption to the natural descendants of the ruler in the male or female line.

Even if the adoption had taken place immediately after Desai's death, it was legally correct, for under Hindu law, a widow possesses the right to adopt an heir to her husband when he dies childless. The contention, therefore, that the adoption was not legal was thoroughly untenable.

His next contention was that the adopted child was not a direct descendant of the Desai. It can be seen from

the covenant entered into by the Desais with Sir Thomas Munro that there was no such condition.

With these insufficient, partial and baseless arguments and hypothetical doubts, he held the view that the state should lapse to the East India Company, and in case it continued under the Kittur rulers, there would be a long minority and he should be entrusted with the responsibility of conducting the government of Kittur.

Only one point which needs to be explained: why was the letter of 10 July, 1824, delivered as late as on 12 September, 1824? The reasons are obvious. There is evidence to believe that Kannur Mallappa himself was interested in giving his son in adoption to Shivalingarudra Sarja. Similarly, there were many other relatives who were aspiring to give their children in adoption. If the actual adoption was made public, there would be open rivalry and intrigues among the relatives and officers in the court. Therefore, the letter was not sent to Thackeray immediately. Only when it became certain that Shivalingarudra Sarja was about to die, i.e. on the evening of 11 September, 1824, after the confidential meeting addressed by Rani Chennamma when she made fervent appeal to all of them to safeguard the interests of the state, the letter was handed over to Kannur Mallappa and Sardar Mallappa Shetty late in the evening to be delivered to Thackeray.

It is also true there are some discrepancies in the statements of Kannur Mallappa and Sardar Mallappa Shetty when they were interrogated by Thackeray regarding the time of the death of Shivalingarudra Sarja and of the adoption ceremony of Shivalingappa. But it should be remembered that Kannur Mallappa himself was a disgruntled person of doubtful loyalty. He would himself have liked some misunderstanding to have been created between Chennamma and Thackeray. It is also possible that both Kannur Mallappa and Sardar Mallappa, frightened and shaken by the anger of Thackeray, who was a petty despot, might have in their nervousness blurted out things which obviously were in themselves contradictory.

William Chaplin, Commissioner of Deccan, stationed at Poona, seems to have believed most of what Thackeray wrote about the developments in Kittur. He, too, like the typical imperialists of the East India Company, seems to have been anxious to annex Kittur to the British territory. They seemed to be in league with each other. On 20 September, 1824, Chaplin wrote to Chief Secretary William Newnham in Bombay, forwarding Thackeray. In this letter Chaplin stated:

> Had the adoption of a son been regularly made with the previous permission of the government, there would, I presume, be no doubt about the policy of continuing the succession; an adopted son being equal in the eye of Hindu law to a son born in wedlock. This

adoption, however obviously obtained, the ceremony having been postponed till the Desai was reduced to extremity. The degree of consanguinity too of the pretended adopted is so remote, that the Kittur *vakil* now here cannot give me any trace of it. I am, therefore, anxious to receive as soon as practicable, orders of the government for my guidance in such a delicate conjunction of circumstances. In the meantime, the measures adopted by Mr Thackeray will, I think, meet the approbation of the government.

As the estate has only recently been formally recognised as a *samsthan*, which I fancy may be construed 'chiefship' or 'principality', it would be an unpopular measure, perhaps to resume it. This, however, is the natural course to follow. If the adoption were not confirmed, it will be in conformity to the terms of the *sannad*.

If the adoption be confirmed, I think, it will be for the advantage of the minor and that Mr Thackeray should take the management of the estate into his own hands till the heir be of age to assume it, there being, I fear, no persons belonging to the family with whom the responsibility could safely be trusted.

In the meanwhile, according to his decision conveyed in a letter to Chaplin, Thackeray appointed Haveri Venkata Rao and Sardar Mallappa to look after the treasury. He gave them detailed instructions to keep a watch on the palace and ensure that nobody entered or left the palace

without being searched. Even the movements of the members of the royal family were restricted.

The Chief Secretary Newnham, however, seems to have been more open and fair minded and reluctant to precipitate matters. Chaplin, again in his letter of 23 September, 1824, wrote to Newnham, forwarding a copy of the pedigree of the family received from Thackeray, the political agent of Dharwar. While forwarding this letter he remarked:

> As this paper is drawn out by the interested servants of the late Desai and is unsupported by any documentary proof, I fear that no reliance whatever is to be placed upon its accuracy, particularly, as all the affairs of the estate seem to be purposely involved in some mystery, which leads the political agent to think that there is some truth in the report of some of our native public servants having received considerable rewards when the new *sannad* was issued to the late Chief Mr Thackeray is however, making further enquiries touching the genealogy of the family, the result of which will be forwarded when finished.
>
> In the event of it being the pleasure of the government to continue the estate in the hands of the present claimant, I beg leave to suggest the expediency of entering into some stipulations for the better management of the police of the territory which, being intimately intermixed with ours, requires to be placed on a more efficient footing. The introduction

of a system of custom duties more analogous to that which is established in the British territory is also essential, and it should be clearly understood that the local mint of Kittur is not again to be opened.

It has been usual to take a considerable *nazar* on confirming the succession to an heir of the Desaiship and on the accession of Mallappa Veerappa Sarja the sum of ₹90,000 was levied on this account, as this sum was doubtless exclusive of private gratification to the ministers of the Peshwa's court. I think that ₹1,75,000 or one year's extra *pesheesh* would be moderate fine or relief on the present occasion, when there appears to be no male descendant existing of the branch of the late Desai.

On 24 September, 1824, Chaplin wrote another letter to the Chief Secretary, forwarding another alleged confidential letter from Shri Venkata Rao, the manager, on the part of the government at Kittur, in which he stated that:

> The Desai died about 10 p.m. on 11th September and not on the 12th as reported; that three of the principal servants concealed the fact and on the pretence of sending the balance of *pesheesh* to Dharwar took ₹1,50,000 from the treasury and three caskets of jewels; that without consulting the family and old servants, they made up the story of the adoption, the ceremony of which was performed on the following morning and that the late Carbaree

> Mallappa has large sums of money belonging to the late Desai in his possession.

He went on to add:

> These statements, Mr Thackeray informs me, are confirmed by the accounts that have reached here.
>
> Although Mr Thackeray is unwilling until he shall have received the orders of the government as to the management of the Kittur estate, to disturb the existing order of things, he is of the opinion that it will not be safe hereafter to continue the authority of *Carbarees* to so intriguing a character as Mallappa, who is at present joint manager with Venkata Rao, one of the head *gumashtas* (messengers) of the Dharwar *cucherry*.

Newnham replied to this letter on 25 September, 1824, conveying the approval of the Governor-in-Council to Thackeray's actions. Newnham, however, apparently a more fair-minded person, and not interested in taking any action that would appear unreasonable in Kittur while approving Thackeray's actions, expressed his own apprehensions about the former's statements. He wrote:

> Not having the whole *sanad* referred to, the Governor in-Council is not altogether without doubts as to the footing on which the Chief of Kittoor (Kittur) is placed towards the British government. From the nature of the grant, however, and from the expressions in the

article of the *sannad* transmitted by Mr Thackeray, it may be inferred that although the Kittoorkar and his descendants were constituted sovereign princes during the continuance of the direct line and were thus in a situation materially different from that of *jahagirdars*. Yet there was nothing in the *sannad* to prevent the territory reverting to the Company in the event of complete extinction of the family to whom it was granted.

It is on this supposition that the following instructions are grounded, but before you carry that into effect, you should be careful to satisfy yourself by an examination of the *sannad*, that the position is correct.

If nothing should appear in the *sannad*, to release the Kittoorkar from the ordinary obligations regarding adoption it will be be necessary for the sake of impressing the other *jahagirdars* with a clear idea of the rights and intentions of the gavermment, to notice the irregularity that has occurred, with considerable strictness in the commencement; however, we may ultimately abate the rigour of our proceedings.

It should therefore be announced that the British government does not recognise the adoption as having made (if made at all) without permission of the government and as being besides, as yet, entirely unsubstantiated by proof of any kind. Mr Thackeray should then proceed to take charge of the whole principality if that has not already been done, and should afterwards commence an enquiry into the circumstances of the adoption.

The first point to ascertain was the relationship of the person adopted to the Desai. If it should appear that he is a descendant of the Desai who possessed the country before the conquest of it by Tipu Sultan and he would be the Desai's nearest heir, even if no adoption had taken place, all informalities in the adoption may be viewed with indulgence and any clear proof of the Desai's intention to adopt may be considered as sufficient.

If, he is a near relation descended from the old Desais, even the fact of the adoption maybe considered immaterial and he may be admitted at once on the conditions to be hereafter noticed.

If on the other hand, it shall appear that the claimant is neither the descendant of the ancient Desais, nor a near connection of the late Desai by the female line, the adoption should not be admitted, however correct in point of form and the principality should be considered as lapsed and should be annexed to the Company's territories, proper provision being made for the females in the Desai's family and for all his old servants and dependants.

I now come to the condition on which *jagir* is to be restored. If the person said to be adopted should prove (contrary to the accounts hitherto received) to be so near a relation of the Desai as to make it probable that the permission of the British government to adapt would have been given if solicited and if the reality and the regularity of the adoption be established, the principality should, in that case, be given without

any alteration in the terms or in the language of the *sannad*, further than may be required, to remove any ambiguity that may have been found to exist in the former one.

If the adoption should have been irregular although the person was of the description explained in the last paragraph, or if the adoption should have been perfectly regular, though the person adopted was not so nearly related to the Desai, in either case, the principality should be eventually given up to him, but not without new terms such as may hereafter be settled for establishing the mint or the other inconvenient privileges and arranging such exchanges and other adjustments as may be necessary for the consolidation of our territories.

The private property of the Desai should, in all the cases supposed, be disposed of according to the Hindu law of inheritance, and if the government should be entitled to any part of it, should not be taken until the most liberal consideration had been given to the claims and circumstances of all connections of the deceased.

After receiving this letter of approval for the measures taken by him with regard to the affairs of Kittur, Thackeray became more and more tyrannical. As his report of 14 September, 1824 reveals, he had entrusted the management of the state jointly to two managers, one representative of the state and the other representative of the British government. They were charged with the

responsibility of the administration of the state and safe custody of the treasury. Venkata Rao carried false and malicious tales to Thackeray and Mallappa Shetty was removed from the office. He threatened and intimidated the Sardars and other officers connected with the court. He appointed *amaldars* to examine the accounts of several villages. The victims of such intimidation were Kannur Mallappa, Kittur Gurushantappa, Sardar Mallappa, Narasing Rao and others. He dismissed several employees in the palace without consulting the members of the royal family or their trusted advisors. He appointed a *mamlatdar* and a few other servants to look after the affairs in Kittur and ordered that nothing should be done without the express permission of Haveri Venkata Rao, who was foisted on the Kittur officials. They were threatened with severe punishment if they disobeyed him.

The treasury was entirely under the control of Thackeray and his assistants. He placed a guard of government sepoys on the plea that "it was dangerous to continue the Desai's guards as sentries over the treasury, amounting to no lakhs, lest, under the pretence of an attack from plunderers, they should themselves commit depredations upon it." Thus, under the pretext of safeguarding the treasury, as many as thirty British government sentries were posted at the east and west gates inside the fort. The Desai's guards were also allowed to continue on duty. Thackeray issued orders

to the key men to furnish bonds, thus rendering themselves responsible for the safety of the treasury. Chennamma, who was considerably annoyed by these acts of Thackeray, sent Rachappa, the *vakil* of Kittur *samsthan,* and Lingo Pant, the *vakil* to wait upon H.E. Mountstuart Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, to put forth the grievances of the royal family. This they did on the 8 October, 1824, but the appeal did not evoke a favourable response from Governor Elphinstone.

Thackeray also wanted to create some misunderstanding among the members of the royal family. He sent secret messengers to Veeramma, the widow of the Desai, and tried to poison her mind that the alleged adoption was not in her interest, and that it would leave her destitute.

Veeramma, however, as all the members of the royal family, did know of the nobility of Chennamma's character. Every one knew that Chennamma had herself volunteered to offer her son as a bodyguard to Shivalingarudra Sarja, the son of Rudramma. But unfortunately he had died early. Her love and affection for the members of the family and her pride of Kittur *desgat* were bywords in Kittur. The wily machinations of Thackeray, therefore, did not work.

Chennamma was alive to the situation and bided her time. The fort and the palace also were surrounded by the British guards and soldiers. Secret messengers were posted everywhere to carry news about the

happenings in the palace. The Sardars and other officers were not allowed to meet her, nor was she allowed to meet people of the state, who loved and adored her. The members of the royal family were treated with scant respect, and even their restricted movements were watched closely.

The situation was becoming unbearable. To add insult to injury, Thackeray ordered that Shivalingappa, the adopted son, should forthwith be sent away from Kittur. There was a sinister motive behind this move: Shivalingappa's presence in Kittur would keep alive the hopes of the people of Kittur to regain sovereignty for the state. Rani Chennamma was very annoyed by this order. She was not prepared to stay in Kittur if the heir to the throne was sent away. She requested Thackeray to allow her and Veeramma to go to Poona and Bombay; and if this request of theirs could not be granted, then to allow them to go to Benaras. Thackeray's arrogant reply to this request was that Chennamma alone might go if she wanted to, and that he would provide for her expenses but that the Desai's widow who was young need not go and that, however, there was no need to have made reference to him and that they might go, if they wanted to. He also stuck to his decision that Shivalingappa, the adopted son, should leave Kittur without any further loss of time. Unable to tolerate the agent's high-handedness any longer, on 11 October, 1824, Rani Chennamma and Veeramma addressed a

joint letter to Chaplin. The translation of the text of the letter is as follows:

> We sent you, through Rajappan, accounts of the proceedings of the *samsthan*, the receipt of which communication you have not acknowledged.
>
> You have always known the support which the *samsthan* has hitherto received from the gentleman here (referring to Thackeray). He continues to act as he thinks proper. We have never interfered with him in any manner. There is a certain polite attention due to us which, as of everything else, you are aware of, and which we have always received from you. Unmindful, however, of the respect to which we are entitled, Saheb Mr Thackeray requested an interview with us; we, feeling that the *samsthan* was in his hands and that to him we must look for everything, replied to all respecting which he asked us. He begged for the keys, which we gave to him. Opening the treasury, he counted the treasure and sealed it with his own seal. The expenses of the *samsthan* are great. Many *jungamas* are constantly coming here, for giving alms to whom no appropritate place has been reserved.
>
> We never go out; for friendship's sake, however, we had an interview with Mr Thackeray. To this, God has reduced us. We have endured everything patiently, but to you we look for ordering the continuation of the whole *samsthan*.
>
> Saheb is taking an account of the stables, *palkhanas*, *siledars*, *sebundies*, etc.; every minute thing is subject

to scrutiny; we can have nothing that we wish for. We find it, therefore, difficult to remain and show ourselves in the *samsthan*. It rests, therefore, with you to support the *samsthan* and maintain its renown. We have placed at the head of the *samsthan* a child *Chiranjeev* in whose name the seal has been engraved. It is now peremptorily desired that he be sent away. The child was kept in the *samsthan* but an opportunity for obtaining orders respecting him did not occur.

The child was here. What was the usage of the *samsthan* to do, was done, and no novelty occurred. It was the act of the assembled dependants of the *samsthan* and the child cannot, therefore, be sent away. If he be sent away, it will not be proper for us to remain.

The tyranny exercised here is becoming intolerable; feeling confident that you would relieve our pain and support our honour, we sent a *vakil* to represent to Mr Thackeray; that he having taken charge of the treasury of the *samsthan* and possessed himself of all the deeds and *sannads* and having appointed his *mamlatdars*, there was little advantage to us to remain in the *samsthan*; that we had heard the promises of making arrangements for us but, after his proceedings of the nature described, we begged therefore, for permission to go to Poona and Bombay for the attainment of our wishes and that failing in that quarter we proposed going to Benaras.

To this message we received for answer that as we were about to depart we need not have made the reference to him and that we might go.

His language towards us differs daily. He is constantly charging the vassals of the *samsthan* with wrong. These persons have lived happily in the service until the present; how are they now to seek employment elsewhere? Having been once employed they cannot be discharged. The language described has been altered towards them who have faithfully and peaceably performed their duties; how can they now be maltreated?

We have written and sent you this statement for your information. By ordering Mr Thackeray to continue the *samsthan* you will acquire fame. The garrisoning of the forts with strangers, your subjects, is a measure now in contemplation. A rumour on the arrival of troops from Kaladgi has reached us. New servants are taken into employment. In a word, arrangements are being made for no other purpose than the full resumption of the *samsthan*. To collect troops and drive out the child and to meet every word of remonstrance by rigour are acts in contemplation. We inform you of the circumstances.

Finally, we must look to you to give us possession of the *samsthan*, to support us as on former days, and thereby to acquire renown. Except yourself we have none to assist us. Feeling confidence in you, we have endured patiently all that has been done to us. Rachappa will inform you of the rest.

Chaplin remained quite indifferent to the requests of the royal ladies. Rani Chennamma waited patiently

for a week for a reply from Chaplin. She finally made up her mind to face the crisis boldly. On 18 October, 1824, she called all the Sardars and officers of the court and addressed them. She apprised them of all the steps taken by Thackeray to humiliate them. She was enraged at the treatment meted out to the members of the royal family and to the officers of the court. In an impassioned speech, she declared:

> Kittur is ours. We are masters of our own territory. The Britishers say that the adoption is not valid because we did not take their permission. Where is it stipulated that we should take their permission for taking a son in adoption? The political agent, Mr Thackeray, in his insolence of power, has said that we have lied regarding the adoption. He is prepared to believe the words of a mere servant of the Company, like Dr Bell, but is not prepared to believe us. These Britishers have come to our land on the pretext of carrying on trade and now seeing that we are quarrelling amongst ourselves they want to grab our land and rule over us. They want us to pay them huge sums of *nazarana*. They might have vanquished other rulers in this part of the country by their cunning and wicked manoeuvres. If the Peshwas have done some wrong to us, let us not forget that they are our own kith and kin. Some day they may realise their follies and join hands with us to drive away these foreigners from our sacred land. Are these Britishers our kith and kin? Do they belong to our country?

> Thackeray and his sycophants are labouring under a great illusion that they can vanquish Kittur, a small state, in no time. They are certainly mistaken. They do not know that the people of Kittur love freedom more than life. This sacred land of Kittur has been sanctified by the blood of thousands of martyrs who have fought for independence and held its banner of freedom flying high all these years. We are no doubt a small state. Our army compared to the British may be small in number. But they are not mercenaries. Patriotism and the love of this sacred soil and love of freedom flows in their veins. Each one of us is equal to ten of their soldiers. We will tell Mr Thackeray and Mr Chaplin that we will not submit to them, whatever be the consequences. Kittur will fight to the last man on its soil. They would die rather than be slaves of the British.

This inspiring speech of Rani Chennamma roused the valour of the people assembled. The swords of the Kittur soldiers flashed. In one voice they all shouted, 'Long Live Kittur', 'Long Live Rani Chennamma'. Their shouts and the sound of bugles resounded in the ramparts of the Kittur fort. The call to battle had been sounded.

6

THE GREAT VICTORY

After taking leave of her loyal Sardars and officers that evening, Rani Chennamma retired in an exultant mood. That night, legend has it, she had a dream in which her late husband Raja Mallasarja appealed and spoke to her. He told her that the time had come when she had to play a heroic role to save the honour and freedom of Kittur. He exhorted her to don the armour of a soldier and lead the army against the British. Rani Chennamma gave her word on solemn oath, that she would obey his orders and lead the fight against the foreign invaders. When she woke up next morning, she vividly recollected the dream. She immediately went to the *kalmath* to meet His Holiness, the Swamiji, and received his blessings. She returned to the palace and sent for Sardar Gurusiddappa, chief commander of

the army, and some other high-ranking officials. They discussed with her battle plans and the strategies they should adopt in their fight against the British.

Rani Chennamma was aware of the superior might of the British army, both in number and equipment. She hoped that the Raja of Kolhapur would come to her aid in this hour of great crisis. A messenger was hastened to Kolhapur with a request to send a contingent of his army to Kittur. Sardars, *subedars, killedars, dalvais* and *choubaries* of Kittur state were given detailed instructions. She sent messengers to the *shetsanadis* (people holding lands for military service) in all the neighbouring villages to rush to Kittur. *Killedars* rode furiously to the eight villages surrounding Kittur to stand guard on the watch-towers and to send alarm signals in case they sighted any movement of the enemy. *Killedars* were also posted to guard the ramparts of the fort at Kemmanamardi and Gadadmardi, on the western side of the palace which commanded a sweeping view of nearly 15 to 20 miles (23 to 30 km) of the surrounding area. The Kittur garrison in those days consisted of 7,000 army men, 2,000 horses, 1,000 camels and 50 elephants, two 24-lb brass guns, and fourteen others of a higher calibre. The Kittur warriors were equipped with guns, daggers, bows and arrows, spears, axes and many other weapons. In addition to this, there were about 6,000 *shetsanadis* (trained fighters), whose services could be requisitioned in

times of war. The entire army was put on full alert and posted at battle-stations.

Specific instructions were issued to all the *killedars* and *dalvais* of the guard-posts to ignore all orders of the British officers and to tell them that they would not do anything without the express orders of Rani Chennamma.

The scene was one of hectic activity, both in the fort and outside. Messengers were running in all directions from Kittur to carry out Rani Chennamma's errands. The few British soldiers, who had been stationed at the gates, tried to stop them. There was open defiance by Rani Chennamma's men who told them that they were obeying the orders of their Queen and nobody could prevent them. Recovering from their surprise, they promptly sent a message to Dharwar that the people of Kittur were in a defiant mood and that trouble was anticipated. Thackeray received this message on 19th October. He had, by then, received secret information that the British Company of the 5th Regiment of Native Infantry, 500 strong and about 100-strong Horse Brigade Artillery were proceeding from Kaladgi to Belgaum. He sent an urgent message to them to make a detour and go over to Kittur where he apprehended some trouble. This detachment reached Kittur on the morning of 20 October, 1824.

In the meanwhile, Thackeray had reached Kittur along with a small army contingent at his command and

a few of his officers working with him at Dharwar. He thought that the very presence of the British army on the outskirts of Kittur would terrorise the rulers and people of Kittur, and that they would make humble submission. He was quite confident that he would be able to crush the revolt in no time. He ordered that tents be erected on the eastern side of Kemmanamardi for the fighting forces and a little away on the western slopes, tents be erected for a few family members of the officers who had accompanied the garrison. During the afternoon and evening of 20th October, the British soldiers were busy making arrangements for these camps.

On the 21st morning, Thackeray sent his political assistants, Stevenson and Elliot, to the Kittur fort, to obtain a penalty bond from all the important officers and leading men of Kittur, rendering themselves answerable for the security of the treasury of Kittur. They, accordingly, met Sardar Gurusiddappa and other officers of Kittur and asked them to comply with the orders of Thackeray. They did not know that the atmosphere in Kittur had completely changed and that the people were in a defiant mood. The commanders dismissed the agent's orders as no documents could be signed without sanction from Rani Chennamma. Thackeray was enraged and sent for the commander of the Horse Artillery, which was about 100-strong, ordered him to rush his artillery into the fort and capture the commanders of the Desai's army. When

the Horse Artillery stormed into the fort, Sardar Gurusiddappa, who had kept his men on full alert, promptly commanded his men to repel and chase them away. The Kittur forces made a bold front and overpowered the British soldiers.

In the meanwhile, the Desai's guards had shut the gates of the fort and the British Horse Artillery men, being completely overrun and routed, had to escape out of the fort by the sally-port. Rani Chennamma's soldiers chased them out of the fort, killing a few of them until they retreated to their camps on the outskirts of Kemmanamardi.

A few of the British soldiers had found refuge in some private residences, while some were hiding in the tents near Kemmanamardi. The Kittur soldiers captured about forty persons and brought them to the palace. These included twelve children and a few women from the British officers' camp. When they were brought in the persence of Rani Chennamma, she ordered the soldiers to be imprisoned. For the women and children she had only gentleness and admonished her soldiers for taking them into custody. At her orders, these women and children were taken inside the palace and given food and shelter. Rani Chennamma came down from her throne, patted the children lovingly and asked them not to be afraid; she told them that no harm would be done to them. Her affectionate treatment drove away their fears and they were soon at home. All the women

and children were taken to the guest rooms in the palace, given food and were treated with the customary generous hospitality extended to guests in the Kittur palace.

She, then, sent word through a messenger, to the officers camping on the outskirts of Kittur, that their women and children were safe and that they could be taken back any time. When Thackeray came to know about this gracious gesture of Rani Chennamma, he was moved. He wanted to meet this noble lady and talk to her. He even thought, it is said, of trying to persuade her to enter into an agreement with the British to stop all hostilities in lieu of an *inam* (prize) of eleven villages. The message was conveyed to Rani Chennamma who dismissed it with a gesture of contempt. She had no wish to meet Thackeray. She sent word saying that she was indisposed and not in a position to meet him. Thackeray, thinking that she might see him the next day, postponed his departure. That night again Rani Chennamma called Sardar Gurusiddappa and other leading Sardars and officers and, after discussing all the issues, they unanimously came to the conclusion that there was no point in meeting Thackeray, who had already camped with an army near Kittur with the avowed purpose of intimidating the Kittur people into submission to British sovereignty.

Thackeray went to the *cucherry* in the fort precincts the next morning with the intention of meeting Rani

Chennamma. No person of the family nor any of the Sardars would come to him when called to accompany him to the Desai's house. He beckoned them several times but they declined. It was the Mahanavami Day and there were festive celebrations in the palace. Sardars, *subedars* and leading men of Kittur, and *shetsanadis* from neighbouring villages had assembled in a large number in the Assembly Hall inside the palace. Thackeray could see streams of people entering and leaving the palace. Disappointed and at a loss, he left in a huff and returned to the camp to ponder and decide on a course of action.

In the evening, he sent his messengers to Sardar Gurusiddappa and other top officers to come and meet him immediately. They refused to come on the plea that they had not been treated with courtesy and that they had no intention of meeting him. Thackeray, infuriated by this open defiance, ordered Capt. Black, commander of the troop of gunners who had accompanied him, to roll the mortar guns to the fort gates. Accordingly, two mortar guns were moved near the fort and stationed near the gateway. It was already getting dark. Furious as he was, Thackeray sent, word to Rani Chennamma that serious consequences would follow if by morning they did not surrender and come to terms. It seems that he had already decided to act, perhaps in order to wreak vengeance, if the Kittur people were not on their knees before daybreak.

The following morning, 23 October, 1824, the artillery officer of the British army proceeded to the fort to change guards. He found the outer gate of the fort locked and Rani Chennamma's guards refused to let the British officers enter. Several messages were sent by Thackeray, demanding that the gates be opened and sentries allowed in to change guard for duty. There was open defiance by Rani Chennamma's men. Thackeray ordered Capt. Black to bring the other two mortar guns and place them also near the gateway. This was done so that the British could blow open the gates at a moment's notice.

In the meanwhile, Thackeray had received information that nearly 2,000 men had assembled on the *ghuree* inside the fort, while some more were coming into the fort every minute. He, therefore, ordered his fighting forces consisting of horse artillery and cavalry to proceed towards the fort gates. He then sent a messenger to Sardar Gurusiddappa, Commander-in-Chief of the Kittur army, with a stem warning that the gates be opened forthwith. Sardar Gurusiddappa, replied that unless all the British troops were moved back to a safe distance, the gates would not be opened. Thackeray, then, sent a final warning through a messenger that if the gates were not opened in a *ghuree* (24 minutes) they would be blown open by the guns. There was no response to this threat. Thackeray posted two of the commandants of his fighting forces, Capt. Black and Lt.

Deighton, on either side of the gate. The artillery and the cavalry under the command of Mr Sewell was made to stand a few yards away from the gateway in readiness to attack the fort. Those were tense moments. As the British soldiers stood watching to see whether the gates would be opened or not, after the expiry of twenty-four minutes, the gates of the fort were burst open from inside and Rani Chennamma's gallant horsemen thundered out at lightning speed and attacked the British garrison.

The Kittur forces attacked from two sides, one from the gateway and the other from the ramparts of the fort. Sardar Gurusiddappa commanded the forces who attacked from the gates, while Rani Chennamma, standing on the ramparts, directed the military operations from above. Stretching herself erect, as she sat on her agile horse, with a golden belt around her waist from which hung her scabbard and holding a drawn sword in her right hand, her left hand holding the reins of her horse, she looked the very picture and embodiment of courage and determination. Her soldiers made a quick sally and put every enemy soldier to the sword. They seized the guns from Capt. Black and Lt. Deighton who were about to fire them. Their heads were chopped off by the infuriated soldiers and their bodies cut to pieces. Chennamma's army then made an attack on the horse artillery and troops.

The British army retreated under this fierce onslaught. The Kittur soldiers rushed into the British garrison and

massacred as many as they could. And on the summit of the fortress was Rani Chennamma on horseback, directing the movements of her army. On her side was her devoted bodyguard, Sadhunavar Balappa of Amtur. She was surrounded by four soldiers on horseback, carrying guns and swords to shield her all the time from possible attack on her person. The attack by the Kittur army was so sudden that the British soldiers had no time to recover. Many of them had been hacked to death by Chennamma's forces. Confused and demoralised, they fled. There was panic everywhere. Thackeray, seeing his panic-stricken soldiers, jumped on to his horse and galloped towards the fort. Sadhunavar Balappa, a warrior of renown, saw Thackeray making for the summit where he stood with Rani Chennamma. Aiming his gun at Thackeray, he fired. He was an excellent marksman; the bullet hit the Englishman in the chest and toppled him from his horse. A group of soldiers rushed towards him and hacked his body to pieces. A black African soldier by the name of Ram Hasbi chopped off his head and, perching it on the point of his spear and holding it high for everyone to see, ran about the battlefield, shouting, "Thackeray is killed, Thackeray is killed."

The British soldiers lost all hope and scattered away in all directions. In the encounter, nearly eighty British soldiers had already been killed. Some more had been wounded and some had fled. Nearly forty of the British Native Infantry and an European artillery sergeant

had been taken into custody. The rest of the army retreated and fled. The political agent and Collector, Mr Thackeray, was dead, so were lesser known figures, Capt. Black, the commander, Lt. Deighton, Lt. Sewell of the Madras Horse Artillery.

Having won a decisive victory against the British and having chased away the British army beyond the borders of Kittur, Chennamma's army rushed back to Kittur. They had some more scores to settle, this time with their own men. They wanted to do away with the traitors who had all along treacherously aided the British and tried to help them to grab Kittur for their petty selfish gains. The three villains, Diwan Kannur Mallappa, Kannur Veerappa and Sardar Mallappa who had gone into hiding, were discovered and dragged to the fort. Their end was gruesome; they were trampled by elephants.

In the meanwhile, the Kittur officers had received reports that some British officers and employees of the British government at Dharwar and Belgaum *cucherries* were hiding in some private residences in Kittur town. Chennamma's soldiers ransacked the town and ferreted them out. Among them were Mr A. R. Stevenson and Mr Elliot, political assistants to Mr Thackeray, and Mr Shrinivas Rao, the *sirastedar*. They were arrested and brought before Rani Chennamma. The stem commanders sought her permission to execute them. Rani Chennamma and Sardar Gurusiddappa, however,

exhorted them to be patient. As just as ever, the Queen told her men that the prisoners were civilian officers and they should be tried and if any offences were established against them they could be punished in due course. She ordered that till then they be kept in prison as hostages. But for the timely intervention of Rani Chennamma, these officers would have been killed by her soldiers who were in a frenzy.

That night there was great jubilation in Kittur. There were celebrations of victory in the palace, the fort and the town. The ramparts of the fort were illuminated and the sound of bugles announcing the great victory rent the air, resounded in the ramparts of the fort and echoed across the green hills and valleys surrounding Kittur. The gallant soldiers of Kittur had won a great victory in their fight against the mighty British and had completely vanquished them. It was a glorious day, not only in the history of Karnataka but in the history of India's freedom struggle.

7 THE SECOND BATTLE OF KITTUR AND DEFEAT

The British contingent had been completely crushed and humiliated by Rani Chennamma in the battle of Kittur on 23 October, 1824. Some of the fleeing officers and soldiers reached Dharwar to convey the news of the defeat of the British garrison. There was a sizeable number of British military and civilian officers stationed at Dharwar. The news of the defeat was received with stunned disbelief. An European officer of the decimated horse artillery, Dr Turnbull, arrived at about 6 o'clock in the evening and conveyed the bad news to Mr Musgrave Harris, the civilian officer stationed at Dharwar. Harris promptly sent a note to Lt. Col. W. Durand, commander of the army at Dharwar. This is what he wrote:

Sir,

I write to inform you that an engagement has taken place at Kittoor (Kittur), between the troops of the deceased Raja and a part of the horse artillery, sent by the political agent, Mr Thackeray. A horseman who has just arrived at this place, Dr Turnbull, states that the artillery are entirely cut up; several of the Europeans, both civil and military, either severely wounded or killed. Mr Thackeray has given information at Belgaum to Col. Pearce, and I have thought proper to send this information to you as commanding officer to act as you think proper.

Dharwar
23 October, 1824

Sd/-Musgrave Harris
Civil Service

About an hour later, another messenger arrived with the news of Thackeray's death. Mr Walker Fullerton, Assistant Collector of Dharwar, was so panic-stricken by this news that he immediately despatched a messenger to Belgaum with the following message:

Directions

Ride.....Ride

Any officer whatever, Belgaum

Speed, all speed

Sir or Sirs,

For God's sake send a force immediately without delay to Kittoor.

The artillery are cut to pieces. Mr Thackeray supposed to be killed. Captain Black cut to pieces.

Sewell expected to die. Deighton killed, and Thackeray's two assistants Elliot and Stevenson, not heard of. For God's sake, send immediately. Our force is no use whatsoever, as we only master 100 strong.

Dharwar
8 o'clock at night, 23rd

Yours
Sd - Walker Fullerton
Assistant Collector

There was great commotion among the British military and civilian officers at Dharwar. They started sending hectic messages to all their military stations, asking for urgent movement of troops. The very next morning, Lt. Col. Durand sent a messenger to the Officer-in-Command at Bellary to convey the news about the hostilities and Thackeray's death. He also apprised him of the reports he had heard that the Kittur rebels were organising a raid on Dharwar.

In the meanwhile, British soldiers had carried the dead bodies of Thackeray, Capt. Black, Lt. Sewell and Lt. Deighton to Dharwar. Their bodies were buried in the European cemetery at Dharwar.

Meanwhile, the Kittur fighting forces and the people were celebrating their victory in Kittur. The enemy had been vanquished. The enemies within had been done away with. There was an atmosphere of joy and gaiety everywhere. That very night after taking leave of her army, Rani Chennamma visited the *choukimath* along with her trusted assistants and commanders of the

army, such as Sardar Gurusiddappa, Sangolli Rayanna, Avaradi Veerappa, Sardar Himmat Singh, Sri Narasing Rao and a few others. After offering the customary respects to the revered Swamiji of *choukimath*, they had a confidential session in the secret chambers there about the future course of action.

She apprised them of the latest developments. She had received news that a British army messenger had gone from Dharwar to Belgaum with a message for moving the troops from Belgaum, which was their headquarters, towards Kittur. She knew that the British would not rest after this defeat and that they would be mustering strength to come down heavily upon Kittur. She knew both her strength and weak points. The Kittur fort was a very strong one and provided excellent protection. But she was also aware that the Kittur forces alone would be inadequate to fight the British, if they mustered all the armies at their command. The strength of the British forces would be far too superior in number, equipment and technique. Her only hope was a response from the Raja of Kolhapur to whom she had already sent an urgent message about four days ago. But she had not heard anything till then from him.

She also apprised the Swamiji of her army having taken prisoner about forty Britons, including two important civilian officers—Mr Stevenson and Mr Walker Elliot. After thoughtful deliberations, the Rani

and her associates came to a unanimous decision. They agreed that they should zealously pursue their efforts to come to an amicable understanding with the British and persuade them to restore autonomy to the state, as in the past. It was, therefore, decided that a *vakil* of the state should be deputed to meet the British officers to plead for the restoration of the state. They also agreed that Stevenson and Elliot should be utilised as messengers of goodwill, if possible, or as hostages, if ultimately found necessary. For this purpose, it was essential to treat the civilian officers with utmost courtesy and consideration, so that with their help it would be possible for them to bargain with the British officers for favourable terms and for autonomy. If, however, these efforts failed, they were of the view that they should not hesitate and be prepared to fight to the bitter end.

Rani Chennamma had high hopes that the Raja of Kolhapur would soon join them. This would encourage every other patriotic chief of the Deccan state to join in this revolt against British power.

After returning from *choukimath* late at night, Sardar Gurusiddappa, Avaradi Veerappa and Sardar Himmat Singh called on Stevenson and Elliot in the Kittur prison. They assured them that they would be treated with utmost courtesy and would be well looked after. They also informed them that they had sent an appeal to H.E. Mountstuart Elphinstone,

Governor of Bombay, to restore the autonomy to the state, at the same time apprising him of the ill-treatment meted out to the rulers and the people of Kittur by Thackeray. They assured them that no harm whatsoever would be done to them until they heard from Mr Elphinstone. They even promised them that they would be allowed to send any messages they wanted to their colleagues and higher officers, so that they could be kept apprised of the real state of affairs and happenings in Kittur. The two Englishmen were assured that these suggestions had the approval of Rani Chennamma. They also understood that in case these friendly gestures were misinterpreted for weakness and slighted, and if the British tried to overrun Kittur by military strength, the Kittur people, who loved freedom more than their life, would go to any extent. If ultimately Kittur had to surrender, they would first kill both of them and then kill their own women, including Rani Chennamma whose honour they valued most, and then each one of them would die fighting on the sacred soil of Kittur rather than submit to the British rule in Kittur.

The next morning, that is, on 24 October, 1824, the two prisoners together wrote a hurried letter to Mr Chaplin, Commissioner in Deccan, stationed at Poona, apprising him in detail of what had happened on the 23rd October at Kittur as under:

From: J.A.R. Stevenson Esq., 24 October, 1824

To

W Chaplin

Commissioner in Deccan

Sir,

It is my melancholy duty to inform you of the death of Mr Thackeray. He was shot yesterday when on his way to the gateway of the Kittur fort. The Sardars of Kittur had for some days shown great dissatisfaction and at last refused to attend to my directions and having shut the gates, refused admittance to any person. For the safety of the treasury Mr Thackeray had found it requisite to place a guard of sepoys and a few guns in the front and upon access being refused to Captain Black of the Madras Artillery to relieve the guard, Mr Thackeray warned the Sardars that the gate would be blown open if not opened in a *ghuree*.

As the gate was not opened, and as no person appeared with any answer, Capt. Black, Capt. Sewell and Lt. Deighton, with two guns proceeded to blow the gate open. I must shorten my melancholy story. The peons from the fort made a sally and took the guns and put every person to the sword that came in their way. Just at this time, poor Thackeray unfortunately appeared and was shot. The three artillery officers I fear, have also fallen. Mr Elliot and myself escaped but were soon taken. Our own lives were with difficulty saved and we are now

prisoners.They refuse to relieve us until they hear from Bombay but we do not consider our lives as safe as the peons are under no command when once their blood is warmed. Nor do we consider the word of the Sardars in the least to be depended on, if the answer from Bombay to their letter is unfavourable to their wishes. The Sardars say that if they are attacked, they intend first killing the women and then themselves.

Excuse this hurried scrawl. I write with a stick.

Kittur — I have, etc.
24 October,1824 — Sd/-J.A.R. Stevenson

Besides Mr S. and Mr E. one of the *sirastedars*, Shrinivas Rao and a European artillery man with thirty or forty sepoys and native horse artillery are prisoners. The leader in the present disturbance is Sardar Gurusiddappa who acts entirely in the name of the dowager Desai Chanuwa (Chennamma), the widow of Desai Mallasarja. The latter sustains her right to the succession in preference to the widow of the late Desai. His party having now gone so far, is desperate and talks of resisting to the last if the government does not agree to their proposition. Mr S. and myself are to be detained till the answer to their communication arrives, hoping that our safety will induce the government to consider their claims more favourably, should decisive measures be adopted. I have no doubt, they will resist to the

last and probably wreak their vengeance on us. Gurusiddappa is a weak character but most obstinate. He is collecting his *shetsanadis* from every side and the fort probably now contains upward of 5,000 men.

Sd/- Elliot

On the 24th morning, as agreed earlier, Rani Chennamma immediately despatched a small contingent near Mugatkhan-Hubli with instructions to prevent the British army from crossing and to hold them back as long as possible. She gave them orders to sink all the boats on the river-side. This was done to prevent any possible immediate danger of the British army proceeding to Kittur. She ordered a small platoon of her army to patrol the road between Mugatkhan-Hubli and Kittur.

She, then, sent Shri Shrinivas Rao, a *vakil,* to Dharwar to start negotiations with the British to explore the possibilities of an amicable settlement.

Chaplin, Commissioner of the Deccan, had been rudely shaken by these happenings. Shrewd and unscrupulous, he had all along conspired with Thackeray in his evil designs to grab Kittur. He was a typical representative of the British imperialistic bureaucracy of those days. His pride, the pride of a loyal servant of the mighty and invincible British empire, had been shattered by the ignominious defeat of the British. Shattered pride turned into savage vindictiveness.

He had come to know of the overtures made by Rani Chennamma, indicating her desire to come to an understanding and to stop all hostilities to explore the possibilities of an honourable settlement. Chaplin, astute politician that he was, decided to adopt a cunning strategy, as the future course of happenings surely indicate, of pretending to continue the negotiations only upto the time the British would be able to muster sufficient military strength to suppress Kittur. This policy was very cleverly pursued. He appointed Mr R. Eden as the acting political agent with headquarters at Belgaum and Mr Munro as the acting collector at Dharwar. He authorised Mr Eden to carry on the negotiations.

In the meanwhile, with his knowledge and approval, the British military officers had mobilised all means to rush reinforcements to Kittur from all directions. In his letter dated 25th October, Col. Pearce, Commander of the Headquarters of Field Force Doab stationed at Belgaum, addressed the Quartermaster General of the army at Poona about the steps taken by him to quell the insurrection at Kittur. He gave detailed information regarding the forces moved towards Kittur:

THE UNDERMENTIONED DETACHMENTS MARCHED THIS MORNING FROM BELGAUM TO JOIN THE FORCE UNDER CAPTAIN BLACK AT KITTUR, VIZ. THE HORSE BRIGADE, AND A COMPANY

OF THE 5TH REGIMENT NATIVE INFANTRY WITH MR THACKERAY.

A TROOP OF 4TH REGIMENT LIGHT CAVALRY TWO COMPANIES OF THE 49TH REGIMENT NATIVE INFANTRY

A FURTHER REINFORCEMENT OF HEAVY ORDNANCE

A COMPANY OF HIS MAJESTY'S 46TH FOOT

A COMPANY OF PIONEERS WAS NOW UNDER EQUIPMENT, AND UNLESS I RECEIVE NOTICE FROM THE PRINCIPAL COLLECTOR OF THE TROOPS BECOMING UNNECESSARY IN CONSEQUENCE OF TRANQUILLITY BEING RESTORED AT KITTUR, THEY WILL MARCH IMMEDIATELY.

THE HEAVY ORDNANCE MUST BE LIMITED TO A HOWITZER AND MORTAR, FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF ONLY SUFFICIENT PUBLIC DRAUGHT CATTLE TO DRAW TWO PIECES BEING AT BELGAUM; THE REMAINDER HAVING BEEN DETAILED TO VENGOORLA FOR THE REMOVAL THENCE OF MILITARY STORES.

ALTHOUGH MR THACKERAY HAS NOT MENTIONED THE OCCURRENCE, YET THE BEARER OF HIS LETTER STATES THAT TWO OF THE HORSE BRIGADE GUNS HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO ENTER THE FORT OF KITTUR, AFTER WHICH THE GATE IN THEIR REAR

WAS SHUT, AND THE PIONEERS OPENED FIRE UPON THEM.

THE FORT OF KITTUR IS STRONG; AND AS AFTER THE INSURGENTS SHALL HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO OBEDIENCE TO THE ORDERS OF THE GOVERNMENT, IT MAY BE CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO OCCUPY IT IN FORCE FOR SOME TIME, I WOULD BEG TO BRING TO HIS EXCELLENCY'S NOTICE MY VERY SLENDER MEANS IN TROOPS TO FURNISH SUCH FORCE.

According to the orders of Col. F. Pearce, as mentioned in his letter, the regiment under the leadership of Lt. Col. McLeod started from Belgaum to Kittur. A little later, a messenger of the British army arrived from Dharwar to inform that the insurgents planned to attack Dharwar. On receipt of this, Mr I.I.O. Dounoghue, Assistant Quartermaster General of the army at Belgaum, under instructions from Col. Pearce, sent an urgent message to Lt. Col. McLeod to cross Kittur and take a position somewhere midway between Kittur and Dharwar to forestall this attack. The following is the full text of his letter:

Assistant Quartermaster General's
No. 754 of 1824 Office, Camp Belgaum
Dated October 25, 1824

To
Lieutenant Colonel McLeod
Commanding 4th Regiment Light Cavalry

Sir,

The calamitous event that occurred on the 23rd instant at Kittur, and caused the death of Mr Thackeray, also the destruction as well of the Horse Brigade, as of a Company of the 5th Regiment Native Infantry and the confinement in that fort of Messrs Elliot and Stevenson, has given rise to a general insurrection throughout the country, which is said to be strongly patrolled between the Malaprabha river and Kittoor (Kittur), besides the boats on that river being sunk.

Added to these circumstances, information has been received of it being the intention of the Kittur insurgents to attack Dharwar, where is the Principal Collector's treasury, besides a considerable number of convicts; and that the fortress has consequently become exposed to a great danger from its vicinity to the place of rebellion.

It is, therefore, necessary to interpose an adequate force between Kittoor and Dharwar, to cover the latter place from any mediated attack of the insurgents.

With this view, the ordnance, and several detachments of corps, detailed in the margin, are to compose such force, which is placed under your immediate command.

You will accordingly move it tomorrow morning upon Mookut Khan-Hoobly (Mugatkhan-Hubli) on the Malaprabha where, when the ordnance arrives, you will cross that river and proceed to occupy a position nearly midway between Kittoor and

Dharwar, but rather more towards the latter than the former place, so as to cover it.

You will be pleased to consider the detachment under your command as one of observation to gain information regarding the movement of the rebels, rather than aggression; and to that end you will detach strong camp patrols, and make occasional reconnaissances with both Cavalry and Infantry, towards Kittoor of the result of which, with information you may judge necessary, you will keep district headquarters constantly advised.

Ignorance of who is the late Mr Thackeray's successor in the civil department prevents Col. Pearce from giving any instructions relative to your communication with that gentleman; but, should anyone address you as such, you will accordingly communicate with them regarding the existing state of affairs; nor, however, attempting any attack upon the fort of Kittoor without Col. Pearce's previous sanction to the measure.

You are desired to communicate with reserve with the Officer Commanding at Dharwar.

I have, etc.
Sd/-1.1.0. Dounoghue
Asst. Quartermaster
General

But in the meanwhile, as ordered by Rani Chennamma, all the boats on the riverside near Mugatkhan-Hubli had been sunk and the area

between Kittur and Mugatkhan-Hubli was being patrolled by Kittur forces. Col. Pearce conveyed this information regarding the developments on the 24th to the Quartermaster General at Poona under letter no. 712 of 1824, the relevant part of which is quoted below:

> I have in consequence directed the movement under Lt. Col. McLeod of 4th Cavalry as great a portion of that regiment as can be mounted with the exception of one of the squadrons and sick horses, of as many squadrons, as there are bullocks to draw them, of a Company of His Majesty's 46th Foot, of the two flank Companies of the 49th Regiment and of a Company of Pioneers.
>
> I have also ordered the immediate march of the 23rd Light Infantry from Sholapore (Sholapur) upon Belgaum carriage being supplied for their knapsacks.
>
> I have further solicited from the Officer Commanding in the ceded districts an immediate aid in troops as follows: a Company of European Foot Artillery; two complete Companies of His Majesty's 46th Foot, a Regiment of Native Infantry with troops or any force that can be afforded, I have requested may march upon Dharwar. I apprehend, however, additional troops may become requisite.

The same day, he also addressed a letter to the Officer Commanding at Bellary, requesting him to send the following troops:

A COMPANY OF EUROPEAN FOOT ARTILLERY
TWO COMPLETE COMPANIES OF H.M 46TH FOOT
A REGIMENT OF NATIVE INFANTRY

At Kittur, in the meanwhile, Stevenson and Elliot had brief meetings with the Kittur leaders. Stevenson was a sober person who could view events objectively. He pondered over the happenings which had led to the uprising in Kittur, ending in the humiliating defeat of the British forces. He wrote another detailed letter to Chaplin, on the 23rd night, giving a vivid account of the events on the 23rd and hinting, at the same time, that the catastrophe was due to the unwise and avaricious attitude and the precipitate action adopted by the late political agent.

The following is the extract from the letter indicating his reading of the situation:

> Gurusiddappa, one of the head Sardars, and Chennamma, the former Desai's widow, exasperated at some supposed neglect of Mr Thackeray have worked up the minds of the rest. They now find that matters have proceeded much farther than they intended and they seem to depend upon the hostages they hold in their power as their only hope of consideration. We have been informed by Gurusiddappa who still treats us with respect that we shall be detained until answers to their letters arrive from the government; that if they are favourable we

shall be released, but if otherwise, he says, they are determined to destroy the women and the prisoners and to fall in the defence of the place; he is induced to hold this language from fear of the consequences of what has happened, and not, I think with any idea of forcing a compliance to the continuation of the *samsthan*. The force from Belgaum has, we hear, moved as far as the river, but I almost doubt its being strong enough to take the place which now contains, I hear, 10,000 men. Under these circumstances and in the absence of any orders or directions from the government or of any officer with sufficient authority to treat, I have written to the Commanding Officer recommending a halt until directions have been received and informing him that we shall fall victims to the fury of the mob immediately a fire is opened on the place; of this I have no doubt. Indeed we have been so informed by some of the Sardars and the sample of their ungovernable spirit and fury which we unfortunately witnessed on the 23rd can leave no doubt. The *sirastedar*, Shrinivas Rao who is a fellow prisoner, has been allowed to carry our letter to the camp on the condition of his again returning. To him Gurusiddappa has expressed himself in the same terms as he has to us. I do not think that the present unfortunate business or alternative arrangements can be settled without your personal presence. I think, I have now told you as many particulars as I can by letter; should I ever again have the pleasure of seeing you I can enter more particularly into events. I may,

however, add that I believe from the accounts, there is no doubt of their being able to raise 10,000 men; that they are now in artillery and that the *sirastedar* informed me that both the leaders and men appeared desperate.

At Kittur, the enthusiastic Sardars and leaders performed the coronation ceremony of Shivalinagappa on 27 October, 1824. The function was held in the *choukimath* adjoining the Kittur village. The Swamiji blessed the new ruler. It was a large gathering attended by people from all over the Kittur state.

The news of the insurgence had in due course spread and there had been sporadic outbursts of resentment against the British rule in a few places, including Dharwar. The panic-stricken military officials were busy collecting information through their intelligence and acting promptly to rush army units to the affected places. The following extract from the letter of 27th October, from Capt. Pearce to the Quartermaster General, gives information regarding the incidents at Dharwar and the steps taken by him to prevent Kittur insurgents from going to Dharwar.

I have the honour of further reporting for the information of His Excellency, the Commander-in-Chief, that according to undermentioned alterations, the force mentioned in my letter of the 25th instant, to which are added the troop of the 4th Cavalry and

two Companies of 49th Regiment which moved during the night of the 23rd, but could not cross the Malaprabha, marched yesterday morning from Belgaum under the command of Lieutenant Colonel McLeod, 4th Regiment Light Cavalry.

3 squadrons of the 4th Light Cavalry
2 brass 12 lb field guns

The Company of His Majesty's 46th Foot augmented to 100 rank and file.

In consequence of the intelligence that the Kittoor insurgents mediate an attack upon Dharwar, where is the Principal Collector's treasury, and a considerable number of convicts who rose upon the guards over them on the last day of the late Mohurram festival when sixteen were killed, I altered the movement of Lieutenant Colonel McLeod's detachment to a position between Kittoor and Dharwar, instead of upon the former place. And I do myself the honour to enclose a copy of the letter of instructions given to Lieutenant Colonel McLeod for his guidance.

A squadron of the 4th Cavalry has been detained at Belgaum in consequence of a report of the appearance in the neighbourhood of horsemen. Besides the squadron, the recruits, sick horses and families remain at Belgaum.

I have applied to the Officer Commanding at Chitradurga for an immediate aid in any portion of the force there, that he may be able to spare for the purpose of temporarily reinforcing the garrison of Dharwar.

> And I have recommended to the Commissioner that a Bombay Regiment of Native Infantry, or at least a wing of one, be sent to Sholapur to replace the 23rd Infantry at that station.

The very day, Capt. Pearce had also sent a frantic message to Chitradurga to send a contingent of the fighting forces to Kittur.

While these military operations went on, Mr Eden, who had taken over as acting political agent on the 26th October, proceeded from Belgaum to Dharwar. He was in Dharwar on the 26th and 27th where he received the Kittur *vakil,* Shrinivas Rao, and had discussions with him.

He returned to Belgaum on the 28th. In the meanwhile, the letter from Mr Stevenson dated 24th had been received. Mr Eden could visualise the pitiable condition of Stevenson and Elliot, and he immediately sent a message to Capt. Pearce to instruct Lt. Col. McLeod not to cross the Malaprabha river near Mugatkhan-Hubli until he had time to discuss the matter with the Kittur *vakil.* The relevant extract of the note he sent to Col. Pearce on 28 October, 1824, reads thus:

> I would submit to your consideration that the movement of force across the river, before I can give an assurance to the Kittoor Chiefs that it is not our intention to attack their fort or their country till definitive directions shall have been received from Bombay, will probably

cause so great an alarm as to put the lives of M/s Stevenson and Elliot in danger. I expect the Kittur *vakil* immediately, after which I shall be able to judge what effect such a movement is likely to produce and will inform you of it; but I would beg to recommend that the order be suspended till I have sufficient time to inform the Kittoor Chiefs; our intention is not to attack them till directions arrive from Bombay.

I shall be glad to be favoured with your reply.

Accordingly, Pearce sent instructions to McLeod and the latter did not cross the Malaprabha river. Mr Eden's idea in making this suggestion was that if the army were to cross the Malaprabha and come near Kittur, it would get Rani Chemmemma's army alarmed, and they might take precipitate action and kill the two British officers, Stevenson and Elliot.

In the meanwhile, the *vakil* from Kittur arrived in Belgaum the same day. Eden had dicussions with him. The latter insisted that the forces should not cross the Malaprabha river near Mugatkhan-Hubli which would be very near to Kittur, but agreed that they may do so at Yenagi, which was at a safe distance, and halt there and wait for the results of the negotiations with the Kittur Chiefs.

Mr Eden wanted some time to negotiate with the Kittur rulers. He immediately sent another note to Col. Pearce regarding the outcome of the discussions he had with the Kittur *vakil*. To quote:

> Since my last of this date I have had an interview with the Kittoor (Kittur) *vakil* Sinappa and have succeeded in convincing him that our intention is not to attack Kittoor till directions have been received from Bombay. He agrees that should the force cross the river at Yenagee (Yenagi), which is in our own country and not take up a position nearer Kittoor than Narendra, that his master will have implicit confidence in an assurance from me to communicate our determination before the force is moved from Hoobly (Hubli); as this request appears reasonable, I think the period till tomorrow afternoon may be given to him to communicate my assurances to Kittoor, when they will be apprised of our intention as regards a movement on Yenagee towards Dharwar. The Kittoor *vakil* requests a pass from you to the messenger who conveys my assurance to Kittoor that he may not meet interruptions before any of our force. I beg leave to be favoured with your reply with as little delay as possible.

Accordingly, Col. Pearce agreed to move the army to Yenagi. This would take about two days. The understanding was that on the third day, if further instructions were not received by that time, the army would cross the river near Yenagi and proceed towards Kittur. He wrote:

> As the movement of the force under Lt. McLeod's command from its present position to Yenagee will occupy two days and afford ample time for any

communication from you to reach the Kittur Chief, I will so far meet your wishes as to direct that the detachment shall not cross the Malaprabha but only be held in readiness to do so, on receiving orders to that effect.

This deviation from the instructions to Lt. Col. McLeod to cross the river at Hoobly is the utmost that a sense of duty will allow me to concede to your wishes and I request it may be clearly understood that under all circumstances the force will be directed to cross the day after that on which it reaches Yenagee.

The following day, the 29th of October, Col. Pearce wrote to Chaplin and informed him of these developments. He enclosed a copy of the letter of the 26th from Stevenson, with the intention of impressing upon the Commissioner the gravity of the situation.

On 29th October, Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, who had by then learnt through Chaplin and others about the developments in Kittur, reacted quickly and recorded in his minutes quoted below, his decision regarding these developments, and the orders to be carried out.

The Minutes of H.E. Mr Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, dated 29.10.1824

I trust this account may prove exaggerated as far as regards the fate of Mr Thackeray, whose death would be a public loss.

On receiving private accounts of this affair, I yesterday suggested to the Commander-in-Chief, that the troops at Sholapur should be rendered disposable for the reduction of the insurrection in addition to those at Belgaum, and I suggested to the Commissioner that means should be taken to assure the *shetsanadis* (persons holding lands for military service) that it was not intended to dispossess them. The instruments of which the managers have availed themselves are doubtless drawn from this description of the people. Should we not receive immediate accounts of the suppression of the insurrection, every effort should be made to send an overwhelming force for the corpus. Kittoor is in the midst of the lands of the *jahagirdars*, not far from Kolhapur or from Waree, and close to the tract of the mountain which stretches between our territory and that of the Portuguese. It is, therefore, a situation where a jungle war would be long maintained and where it would be likely to spread unless soon got under.

We shall soon receive more full reports. If they are not quite favourable, it would be expedient to assemble two of the battalions of the southern Concan (Konkan) in a camp somewhere near Wengorla or Malwan, to prevent the insurgents being admitted into the territory under Waree and to overawe the Chiefs to the jungly tract further south and east. It might even be expedient to send more troops from Bombay to reinforce Col. Pearce and enable him to act in the jungle with several

detachments, each strong enough to be certain of beating the insurgents, and all constantly in motion on a concerted plan.

In the meantime, it may be proper to publish a proclamation declaring the government of the country to be assumed by the Company in consequence of the extinction of the Desai's family and another proclaiming pardon to all (with the exception of the principals in the late outrage) who may come in by a certain day and the punishment as rebels to those who remain in arms.

It may also be expedient to proclaim martial law, but this measure need not be resorted to.

It appears from these minutes that:

1. Mr Elphinstone had fears of the insurrection spreading and the other *jahagirdars* joining in the revolt and the fight being prolonged.
2. He wanted all the *jahagirdars* to know that the British had declared the Kittur *desgat* as extinct on the death of Shivalingarudra Sarja.
3. He had determined that insurrection in Kittur should be mercilessly put down by military operations.
4. However, with a view to weaken the support of the local people and the fighting forces of Kittur to Rani Chennamma, he had, as a highly diplomatic move, decided to proclaim pardon to all those who had joined the insurrection with the exception of a few leaders. He had come to the conclusion that the British could

retrieve their honour and prestige only by subjugating Kittur.

He had also been convinced that the rebellion was mainly due to the precipitate action of Mr Thackeray and had been a desperate act of impulse.

On the same day, the Chief Secretary, Newnham, wrote as follows to Chaplin, conveying the orders of the Governor indicating the action to be taken:

Sir,

> I have the honour to receive and lay before the Hon'ble Governor-in-Council your despatch of the 27th instant regarding the insurrection at Kittoor.
>
> The Governor-in-Council will await with great anxiety the receipt of your next despatch and sincerely hopes that the accounts hitherto received may prove exaggerated, especially as far as regards the fate of Mr. Thackeray, whose death would be a public loss.
>
> Immediately on the private accounts of this affair reaching the Hon'ble Governor, it was suggested to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief that the troops at Sholapur should be rendered disposable for the reduction of the insurrection in addition to those at Belgaum. It was also notified to you that means would be taken to assure the *shetsanadis* that it was not intended to dispossess them. The instruments of which the managers have availed themselves are doubtless drawn from this description of the people.

Should the Governor-in-Council not receive immediate accounts of the suppression of the insurrection, every effort will be made to send an overwhelming force for the purpose, and to secure the tranquillity of the country.

In the meantime, the Governor-in-Council considers it may be proper to publish a proclamation declaring the government of the country to be assumed by the Hon'ble Company as consequence of the extinction of the Desai's family and another proclaiming pardon to all (with the exception of the principals in the late outrage) who may come in by a certain day and punishment of rebels to those who may remain in arms. It may also be expedient to proclaim martial law but this measure need not be resorted to.

By then, on the 29th, Eden who had a round of talks with the Kittur *vakil*, giving a detailed account of these happenings and his reading of the situation, wrote:

I am inclined to think the melancholy affairs which occurred at Kittur had not been pre-meditated and had not Mr Thackeray prematurely directed an attack with a very inadequate force, nothing of the kind would have occurred. As far as I can judge of the present state of things in Kittur, I apprehend the Chief, Gurusiddappa, and the rest are aware of their having committed a desperate outrage and that they would concede everything if an assurance of personal safety was given to them by the government. They

also appear so well convinced of the unpardonable nature of their late violence and of the decided measures. The government will probably adopt that their only chance of escaping immediate destruction is retaining the persons of M/s Stevenson and Elliot. I much fear the only chance these unfortunate gentlemen have of escaping with their lives would be your immediate presence here when the Kittoor Chiefs might be induced to give them up, on your refusing to have any communication with them till they were released; and though I must fear this is doubtfut. I am confident any lesser authority than yours would be useless in endeavouring to induce them to a release of their prisoners. I have the honour to enclose the statement of Shrinivas Rao.

With reference to the information afforded to Col. Pearce by the *amaldar* of this place and which accompanied his letter to me of yesterday's date, copies of which are enclosed, I beg leave to remark, on examining him as to the grounds for such information, he appears merely to have detailed bazaar reports and his intelligence seems unworthy of a moment's consideration. I arrived here yesterday with all my people so much jaded from continued marching that I have as yet had no time to procure information as to what is passing among the *jahagirdars* and *patwardhans*, but I hope to be able to afford you some authentic intelligence in the course of the day, though I apprehend the whole country is in a state of perfect tranquillity.

On learning the determination of Col. Pearce not to attack the fort of Kittur till directions are received from Bombay, out of consideration for the safety of M/s Stevenson and Elliot, I was induced to inform the Kittoor Chiefs that till such directions had been received, no hostilities would commence against them and have the honour of enclosing a copy of my communication; at the same time, I have endeavoured to insist on the Kittur *vakil* who lives with me that his masters must not entertain an idea that by retaining the persons of our countrymen, they can allay the indignation of the government and that nothing but prompt submission and immediate delivery into our possession of M/s Stevenson and Elliot can at all soften our measure against them.

I have just heard a report of 200 Arabs having marched from Sawantwadi on their way to Kittoor. The information came to the *amaldar* here from a *killedar* on our western frontier who merely says such a report is current in his village.

I have as yet received no communication from any of our *vakils* to the different *jahagirdars* but it is probable their representations have been sent to Dharwar and will reach me soon.

In the light of orders received from Mr Elphinstone and the reports he received from Mr Eden, the Commissioner decided to make more vigorous efforts to replenish his fighting forces by collecting fighting units from all quarters.

Chaplin summoned A.H.S. Cole, the British resident in Mysore who was in Poona, and instructed him to muster all available fighting forces and horse artillery from Mysore. Cole sent the following message on 30th October, 1824, to the commander of the army stationed at Mysore:

> The chief part of Thackeray's force being, as you will see, entrapped inside the fort, he had nothing left but to attempt their rescue in the way he did—the failure was complete and in the enclosed you see the result—Kittoor is in the midst of the southern *jahagirdars*, not far from Kolhapur, the Rajah of which country is malcontent, a turbulent country between the Ghauts is in the rear, and contiguous to Kittoor is a very strong tract of hills and jungle, that lies between the Portuguese territory and runs down to Sonda—we have few troops in the S.M. country and if the insurrection is not soon put down, it will certainly spread. Pray order up towards Ronee-bednore as many of the Rajah's horses as can be spared; any other troops you could assemble of the Rajah's on the Hurryhur frontier would have an impressing effect in preventing the rebellion from becoming more general. We are sending troops but we are very badly off in point of number. Expedition is of all things desirable.

Eden, in the meantime, continued his negotiations with the Kittur *vakils*. He was insisting that the two

prisoners, Stevenson and Elliot, should be released, unconditionally. The Kittur rulers were not prepared to do so until they had some definite assurance regarding the restoration of the state. The Commissioner tried to convince Shrinivas Rao that unilateral release of these persons by the Kittur rulers would evoke sympathy of the British. The Kittur *vakil* thereupon assured Chaplin that he would try to persuade Sardar Gurusiddappa and Awardi Veerappa who were adamant and unwilling to agree to such a condition. Eden wrote to Chaplin on 30 October, 1824:

> I have impressed upon their *vakil* that active measures will be only suspended against them till directions are received from the government but that they must not infer from this that the government will not prosecute operations against them to the utmost rigour and that in a case of this description they must expect little clemency; but at the same time I pointed out the only thing that could under any circumstances soften the determination of the government towards them would be the instant release of M/s Stevenson and Elliot; upon my pressing this, the *vakil* seemed to think that Gurusiddappa and Awaradi Veerappa might be induced to give them up to you but not to any inferior authority. I then explained to him that by showing some confidence in us by releasing their prisoners at once, they might expect the government to take every circumstance in

their favour into consideration, previous to forming their determination, but that an opposite line of conduct would have no alternative. To this, the *vakil* replied that he was well aware that in a case of this kind, our government could never overlook their conduct and agreed. He thought the best thing would be to release their prisoners; he then offered to return to Kittoor and to detail to the Chiefs the conversation I had with him and to do all he could to effect the release of M/s Stevenson and Elliot, from a conviction that it is the only step that can in any way soften the government's determination against them. I consented to his return to Kittoor and shall, immediately I am able, make known to you the result.

Stevenson's letter of 26th October to Col. Pearce about their pitiable plight prompted Col. Pearce to write again to Chaplin on 30th October. This letter clearly indicates Col. Pearce's opinion regarding the strength of the Kittur fort and his fears about the strength of the Kittur fighting forces. It was obvious that Col. Pearce was hesitant to precipitate an attack on Kittur.

The relevant portion of the letter reads:

Whether or not, after a perusal of the papers which have accompanied my letters relative to the disastrous result of the late Mr Thackeray's attempt to enforce obedience to his order of Kittoor and a consideration of the perilous situation of M/s Elliot

and Stevenson as stated in those gentlemen's letters, you will retain the same opinion as is expressed in your letter respecting the measures which should have been pursued against the insurgents, appears to me to be very doubtful. But at all events, I have taken the only steps in consequence of the melancholy events which the small force at my disposal admitted of my doing.

The fort of Kittur is said to be strong and may require to be breached, to effect which a battering train is necessary; also efficient artillery men to use it and draught cattle to drag it; neither of which I have at my command.

The plight of these officers continued to cause anxiety among British officers. The Kittur rulers were reticent and were not prepared to release the officers in their custody. The British considered it a prestige issue and were not prepared to give any assurances regarding the future of Kittur unless the officers were released unconditionally. Governor Elphinstone was naturally worried over the stalemate and wanted to discuss the matter personally with Chaplin. He went to Poona. The minutes recorded by Elphinstone on 31 October, 1824, about his reading of the situation and his decisions thereon are as follows:

Having come to this place to have an opportunity of consulting with His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief and the Commissioner, the

following may be considered as their sentiments as well as my own:

The principal circumstance which has come to my knowledge since my last minute and the only one that occasions any doubt of the expediency of proceeding as there suggested, is the fact that Mr Stevenson and Mr Elliot with several sepoys and others are prisoners in the hands of the insurgents, and are threatened with death unless certain terms said to have been proposed to me are complied with. No proposals have been received subsequent to the breaking out of the insurrection. But it seems nearly certain that the restoration of the *samsthan* to its former footing is among the demands alluded to.

The situation of the prisoners is extremely distressing, that of Mr Stevenson and Mr Elliot is particularly alarming and an anxiety for their fate, is created by the firmness which they show amidst their danger.

But however willing we may be to make concessions to purchase the safety of these gentlemen, regard to the public interests and the security of every European in India renders it necessary that we should not encourage the idea that any desperate adventurer may obtain a compliance with his demands or even secure impunity for his offence by possessing himself of an European hostage. On the other hand, I cannot believe that any submission to the demands of the insurgents is necessary to attain the object so much desired. If the whole garrison

of Kittoor or even all the principal Chiefs were reduced to despair of their own safety, they might be impelled to wreak their vengeance, but if all could be promised pardon and safety, I cannot conceive that they would reject the offer because they were refused the restoration of the *samsthan* or the impunity of their leader when they must be certain that no effort or sacrifice of theirs could have power to extort these concessions.

It only remains, therefore, to ascertain to what extent we can promise impunity and the general advantages we can hold out to those who return to their duty without creating an impression of our weakness or encouraging the commission of similar outrages in future. The revolt of the people of Kittoor, however culpable, appears to have been the effect of sudden impulse and to have been entirely free from every suspicion of treachery. As far as we can discover, it was produced by the too great eagerness of the gentlemen, whose death is the greatest part of the disorder to enforce an obnoxious measure with means entirely inadequate to the purpose. It may have been prompted by the influence of Chunnumwur, but it could only have been brought into execution by the orders and the example of Gurusiddappa, that the Sardar appears to have assumed the direction of the whole enterprise and to have made use of it to gratify his revenge against his personal enemies. It is he also who still appears to act as the avowed head of the

insurgents, although he makes use of the name of Chennamma, the stepmother of the late Desai. It is on Gurusiddappa therefore, that the responsibility of the whole transaction should fall. Even if Chennamma were equally guilty (of which there is no proof), the punishment of a woman of her rank would be highly unpopular, inconsistent with the usual practice of our government. No notice should, therefore, be taken of the suspicions which exist against her. All the other insurgents should be offered a free pardon and should be allowed the same advantages that they would have enjoyed had the insurrection had never taken place, with the exception of the guilty Chiefs who should be treated with less indulgence than was designed.

In pursuance of this plan, I would recommend that a proclamation should be published without delay stating that the Desai of Kittur, having died without children or relations, and his principal servants having been found to have set up a false adoption after his death, have forged his name and to have got possession of his treasure by fraudulent means, it became necessary for Mr Thackeray to take charge of his lands and effects; that it was the intention of the government, if any descendant of the founder of the *samsthan* could be found to have made out a new grant in his favour; if no descendant was found, it was intended to resume the lands but to make an ample provision for the widow and the principal servants and to have continued all *shetsanadis* as

has been done in the rest of the Company's country. The private property, treasure, etc. of the Desai would in either case have been left to his widow. During the investigation, however, Gurusiddappa instigated the people of Kittoor to shut their gate on Mr Thackeray and on endeavouring to force them, he was shot, the sepoys and *golandaz* who were with him to the number of 150 were overpowered and the guns taken.

Considering that the people of Kittoor who had been placed under the immediate government of their own Desai and taught to regard Kittoor as a separate *samsthan* may not have been fully aware of the extent of their allegiance to the British government, that they were misled by the principal officer of the late Desai, and that their resistance to the troops of the government was free from premeditation and treachery. The Governor-in-Council is pleased to grant a full and free pardon to the whole of these misguided men, provided they return to obedience to the government. Gurusiddappa alone is exempted from capital punishment, provided he immediately submits and surrenders himself.

As many of the insurgents as submit before the 20th of November next, shall retain their *inams* and *wattans* and all the *shetsanadis* shall be maintained on the usual footing. The claim of such of the principal servants as shall not have taken prominent part in the rebellion to some provision for their support shall be taken into consideration. A suitable allowance shall

be made for the widow of the late Desai and such provision as the government on enquiry may judge proper shall be granted to the other females of the family.

The treasure and private property of the late Desai will still be considered as belonging to his widow and if any part of it has escaped plunder it will be restored to her. The whole of the Sardars and sepoys in Kittoor shall be held responsible for the safety of the two gentlemen and the other prisoners; should any injury be offered to them the Sardars and all the guilty persons shall be punished with such severity as shall be a terror to future offenders.

Col. Pearce should be instructed to circulate the proclamation and act on the principles of it. A letter should be addressed by the Commissioner to the principal *jahagirdars* and the Raja of Colapur (Kolhapur), acquainting them with what has passed and warning them to prevent their dependants from joining the insurgents. A similar communication should be sent to that gentleman for his adoption.

All communications with the insurgents and all arrangements regarding the Kittoor country should be left to Col. Pearce till Mr Chaplin's arrival until which time he should avoid running any risks.

Mr Chaplin will probably be at Belgaum by the 15th or 20th and the troops will be assembled by the end of the month, should no submission have been made before that time. Col. Pearce should

be directed to use every exertion to prevent the escape of the garrison from Kittoor and especially to prevent them making their way to the jungles. It would be better that he should suspend his attack until his whole force is collected, even if it should occasion a fortnight's delay than commence with a force sufficient to take the place but not sufficient to intercept the fugitives.

The military arrangements which I concur with the Commander-in-Chief in thinking necessary for the occasion, are shown in the following table with the probable dates of their accompaniment:

Corps	*From*	*To*	*Date of Arrival*
6th N.I.	Satara	Belgaum	24th November
Horse Artillery	Poona	Belgaum	-do-
7th M.I.t.Cavalry 23rd M.N.I.	Sholapur	Belgaum	11th November
50 artillery men 1st European regiment 3 N. I. 1 Company or artillery	Bombay	Vengurla	—
2 Companies H.M. 46th Regiment 1st Regiment N. I.	Bellary	Belgaum	—

If it should appear by the returns at Bombay that there is a deficiency of ordnance and store at Belgaum, they should be supplied from the presidency.

From the uncertainty regarding the period required to collect carriages, no dates can be fixed for the arrival of the troops from Bellary and Bombay, but the former supplied for by Col. Pearce on the 25th instant and as the others will move light, it is probable both will be at Belgaum before the end of November.

As time is already of the greatest consequence, I have requested the Commissioner to adapt the measures above described and His Excellency, the Commander-in-Chief has issued the requisite orders for the execution of the military arrangements concerned.

Col. Kennedy has also been directed to concentrate two of his regiments in a camp somewhere in the south of his district where he can be prepared in case the insurgents shall attempt to take refuge in the Waree country or any of the other jungle tracts in the neighbourhood.

The absence of the king's two regiments required by the supreme government, the despatch of the three native regiments to Mhow and Assergur and the circumstance of the Madras government being unable to replace the two regiments taken from the southern Maratha country for Sholapur, have created considerable distress for want of troops in that part of the country.

It will probably be necessary to move the battalion left at Sholapur to Satara without delay. That place when it can be avoided should never be left with less than two battalions.

If the terms offered should not induce the insurgents to submit, a native regiment should be sent from Bombay to the Deccan and in its place, supplied by calling out the Portuguese militia.

Notice should be sent to the Madras government of the death of Mr Thackeray, with an expression of deep concern with which the Governor-in-Council communicates the fate of the gentleman whose distinguished talents and eminent public zeal render his loss of a severe misfortune, both to the presidency to which he belonged and to that which had so long profited by his most valuable services.

Soon after returning to Bombay, the Governor issued instructions to the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Alexander Campbell, to send whatever army Col. Pearce might require and also send messages to Bellary, Ooty, Bangalore and Arcot regarding the regiments and contingents of the army units to be sent to Kittur. He also sent a message to the Chief Secretary to ask Cole, the British Resident in Mysore, to send about 1,000 *siledar* horses of the Mysore army to move towards Kittur. The British Resident in Hyderabad was asked to send a contingent in the first week of November. Letters were also addressed to Madras,

to Lt. Col. Waugh commanding at Malabar and Canara, to send a contingent of army to Honavar and Sadashivgad, with a view to rushing this army from the western area to Kittur. These arrangements were made through Mr T. Babington, Principal Collector, Mangalore.

Rani Chennamma and her followers were, by then, gradually realising the futility of their efforts to fight against the British. But they stood by their principles and were reluctant to surrender the officers without some assurance from the highest quarters. After Rani Chennamma received the reply from Elphinstone, she sent her *vakil,* Shri Govinda Srinivas on 4th November to Munro, Acting Collector of Dharwar, to explain matters personally. Then next day, as a gesture of goodwill, Rani Chennamma released the forty European military personnel who had been imprisoned during the last battle in Kittur. The soldiers returned to Dharwar to rejoin Lt. Col. McLeod's detachment where it was at that time stationed. On 7th November, Munro wrote to Chaplin, apprising him of the plight of Stevenson and Elliot and requested him to be discreet so as not to precipitate matters.

In the meanwhile, Chaplin had instructed Eden to send for as many Desais or their representatives as possible and seek their help to quell the insurrection at Kittur. He also instructed Munro to send for the leaders of Kittur and persuade them to surrender.

Munro sent the following reply to Rani Chennamma's letter on 7th November, trying to impress on her the wisdom of releasing the two officers.

> Your letter has been received and its purport understood. You have mentioned that you do not wish for discord; the guilt of having imprisoned two gentlemen in your fort becomes greater every day. I can discover no benefit which is likely to accrue to you from their continued confinement; that occurrence, however, tends to dishonour the *sarkar*. Those gentlemen are intimately acquainted with the nature of the late affair at Kittoor; through them when released it may be as well known to the *sarkar*, they may plead your cause; their release, therefore, seems to be the only road by which you can hope to receive the leniency of the government.
>
> I request, therefore, that the gentlemen may be sent here and that your *carbarees* may wait upon me to state the Kittur affairs and your wishes for the information of the government. The business is of the first importance and cannot be settled through persons who have little or no authority. Send three or four of your *carbarees* from whom I may inquire the state of affairs. Should matters not be adjusted by their intervention there shall be no impediment to their return; they shall be sent back in safety to the *jahagir*; you are well aware however of this. What more need I say.

Rani Chennamma and Rani Veeravva sent a reply on 12 November, 1824. It is one of the finest specimens of

such letters and clearly reflects her indomitable courage and self-respect, but at the same time not devoid of diplomatic courtesy and grace. A rough translation reads thus:

> The letter sent by you reached us; its purport has been understood. You wrote that you could not see the advantage that would accrue to us by the detention of the two gentlemen as prisoners, that the circumstances had only the effect of casting a reflection upon the *sarkar*. To this, we reply that the imprisonment of the two gentlemen is of use to the *samsthan*; by their means and their representation to the government we wish that arrangements should be made for the continuation of the *samsthan* according to ancient usage. In this hope they are retained; all the circumstances of the case are known to these kind gentlemen; they were appointed by Mr Thackeray as his agents with authority to conduct the affairs of the *samsthan*.
>
> Regarding what you say respecting the dishonour which attaches to the government by the imprisonment of the gentlemen, we have to reply that such has never been our wish, or we should not thus long have maintained a friendship with the British government. For the purpose of conciliation we have hitherto behaved in exact conformity to the wishes of the Saheb (Mr Thackeray). Notwithstanding this, however, he has brought this state of affairs upon us. What remedy have we?

> In reply to your request that the *carbarees* should have an interview with you to arrange matters and report the same to the government, we have to state, you are the person by whom matters should be settled. We have, by letter, made you acquainted with all the circumstances of the case; we have no apprehensions for the safety of the *carbarees*, should they be sent to you; and when a letter should be received from you intimating that the *samsthan* shall be continued to us as formerly, then the *carbarees* shall wait upon you; let the ancient good feeling towards the *samsthan* be continued in you. What more need we write? You have engaged in this affair. That you will represent to the government whatever may benefit the *samsthan* is our hope. Upon this score we are not apprehensive. Govind Shrinivas will relate other particulars in person.

On 14 November, 1824, the Acting Collector Munro, forwarded this letter to Chaplin with the following remarks in his covering letter:

> It is with regret that I observe the disposition displayed in the letter. I still however, feel sanguine that the high tone assumed by the managers will abate as the troops approach Kittoor; the enclosure speaks the sentiments of the ringleaders in the late unfortunate affair. And it is not from them we can look for a ready compliance, aware as they must be, that the government will pass over in oblivion

> an act which has deprived it of the services of four valuable officers. I had no conversation with the *carkoon* (clerk) who stated that the letter contained every information which he could impart, nor have I answered the letter of which he was the bearer, which proves the futility of negotiation till we have the means of inducing a more compliant disposition on the part of the managers.

This letter annoyed Chaplin in no small measure. He personally went to Bombay and had discussions with Elphinstone, the Governor, who advised him to proceed to Belgaum and study the situation from close quarters and take whatever action was deemed necessary to subdue the insurgents. They had both come to the conclusion that Kittur should be invested as soon as the British forces were fully equipped and ready, and that, in the meanwhile, it should be notified to the *jahagirdars* and Desais of the Deccan that the Kittur *desgat* had been finally annexed to the British territory as the state had no legal heir. Chaplin was also instructed, as decided earlier, to announce the proclamation of pardon to all the insurgents except Sardar Gurusiddappa.

In pursuance of these decisions, it was necessary to rush armies from all directions towards Kittur. With these instructions, Chaplin left Bombay for Belgaum on 17 November, 1824, along with the available British army troops at Bombay and Poona with the intention of

collecting more troops from subordinate *jahagirdars* on the way.

By the third week of November, Rani Chennamma's men had come to know of the movements of the British forces. They had heard of a battering train being moved from Vengurla to blast the Kittur fort. A mood of desperation was beginning to set in and they also started making frantic efforts to collect as large an army as possible to defend Kittur.

Just then at Kolhapur, the Raja was contemplating to come to the aid of the Rani of Kittur. Far-sighted as he was, he did not meet Chaplin who was on his way from Bombay to Belgaum and passed near Kolhapur. He pleaded that he was sick, but sent his officers to meet the Commissioner and attend on him. His real reason was that he wanted to go as near Kittur as possible along with his army at a later stage, on the plea of meeting Chaplin so that, if events turned favourable, he could suddenly join hands with the Kittur rebels and vanquish the British. As soon as Chaplin left Kolhapur, the Raja set forth with an army consisting of 5,000 foot soldiers, 1,000 horses and seven guns and came down to camp near Yamakanamardi from where he sent word to Chaplin that he was coming to meet him. However, the latter was too shrewd to be duped by the Raja. He immediately replied that he had no time to meet him and that he need not come. In spite of this, the Raja

proceeded with his army to Munoli and camped there to await further developments.

Chaplin halted at a few places, sent for the Deccan Chiefs who were loyal to the British, collected their army units, and proceeded to Belgaum. Among such Chiefs were the Patwardhan of Sangli, the Chief of Jamkhandi, the Chief of Mudhol and others. He reached Belgaum on the 22nd November.

The Governor, Elphinstone, had decided by then to empower Chaplin to make whatever changes that may be found necessary in the draft proclamation announcing pardon to the insurgents and also authorising him to proclaim martial law if the circumstances warranted it. The letter of 22nd November, from Newnham secretary to Chaplin, conveying the Governor's orders, reads as follows:

ADVERTING TO THE MINUTE BY THE HON'BLE THE GOVERNOR, WHICH FORMS THE RULES FOR THE REGULATION OF YOUR CONDUCT AT THE PRESENT MOMENT ON ALL MATTERS RELATING TO KITTOOR.

I am directed to acquaint you that as it may be necessary for you to modify the terms to be granted to the insurgents as you become better acquainted with their real conduct, the Governor-in-Council is pleased to empower you to make such alterations on the measures to be adapted as you may consider

expedient so long as you conform to the spirit of that minute.

The Governor-in-Council is also pleased hereby to empower you to proclaim martial law in the southern Mahratta country whenever you may think the circumstances of the case require it; and for your information and guidance in this respect he directs me to transmit to you a copy of Regulation 1 A.D. 1820 applicable to the old territories under this government.

Even as these negotiations were going on, the British had not slackened their preparations for war, although it was tacitly understood that hostilities should be stopped. British troops under Col. McLeod advanced from Dharwar to Tadkod, a village about six miles (9 km) east of Kittur, and camped there. Col. Fred Pearce, who had come to know that the Kittur fort was very strong, realised that a battering train would be needed to reach it. He, therefore, ordered Col. Sealy of the Madras Regiment, who was in charge of the battering train, to arrange to send the train to Kittur. In the meanwhile, Col. Pearce fell seriously ill and was, therefore, replaced by Col. Deacon who was stationed at Sholapur. Col. Sealy came to Belgaum on the 24th and returned the same day with an adequate number of draught bullocks to haul the battering train across the Western Ghats to Kittur. Chaplin, who was camping at Belgaum, reported these developments to Newnham in his letter of 24 November, 1824:

1. After I had the honour of addressing you yesterday, reports, which I have some reason to believe authentic, reached me from Kittoor, that three detachments had been sent out from the fort, one estimated to amount to 1,000 men, for the purpose, it was said, of intercepting and destroying any of our people whom they might meet with, and of harassing the country. I trust, however, that this intelligence may prove unfounded.
2. Colonel Sealy's detachment having arrived here this morning from Vengurla, I hope that with the aid of the cattle that has returned with him, there will now be no delay in moving the battering train in two trips towards Kittoor, should the want of sufficient draught bullocks prevent its being taken over in one. When certain of the exact period at which we should be able if necessary to act against the insurgents with complete effect, I shall no longer delay issuing the proclamation directed in the Hon'ble the Governor's minute.
3. The strictness of Mr Stevenson's and Mr Elliot's confinement has been increased during the last four days, under pretence that it becomes necessary to adopt this firmness in consequence of Colonel McLeod's force having taken such a position at Tadkod, a village belonging to us and situated about six miles (9 km) east of Kittoor.
4. It is reported that a *vakil* from Kittoor is to be sent out to me, but this rumour has prevailed since the 20th and no one has arrived.

As planned, almost all the British troops had arrived and their preparations seemed to be complete by 25th November, 1824. One Lt. Col. Walker of the Madras Regiment was posted at Khanapur which was in the possession of the British, to command the detachment there. Major Trewnson was commanding the unit stationed at Belgaum. The British strategy envisaged a three-pronged pincer movement from three sides: from the north from Belgaum, from the south-east from Dharwar via Tadkod (where an army under the command of Col. McLeod was already stationed at Tadkod, only 10 km [15 km] from Kittur), and from the west from Khanapur. The forces were to move simultaneously on Kittur and to invest it from all three sides. Detailed instructions regarding the movement of the armies were conveyed by Mr. I.I.O. Donnoghue, Assistant Quartermaster General of the Headquarters Field Force Doab at Belgaum, as under:

> After arriving with the detachment under command at Cannapure (Khanapur) in advance of Gurug, where as senior officer you will assume the command of the force under the order of Lieutenant Colonel McLeod, and being joined by the troops from Belgaum and from Dharwar, which are detailed in the margin, you will advance by a simultaneous movement of the whole upon Kittoor, which fortress you will completely invest at a distance out of the range of its advance, and in doing so you will consider it an

object of primary importance, to prevent the escape of any of the insurgents from Kittoor as well as into the fortress of the western jungle, as into the fort of Shamsherghur, as the surrounding villages contain the families of the rebels, and this part of the operations will be best performed by Horse Artillery and Cavalry, from the celerity of their movements supported by well-disposed detachments of the Infantry.

Attempts at surprise may be expected, for which reason our most advanced posts should be strong, but more in the manner of security of a chain only, who by falling back without confusion, will draw the enemy from their cover and expose them to the fire and charge of the supports and no advance party should ever be without a strong support, nor cooking or any other related habits be permitted with them.

The troops from Belgaum will march tomorrow morning, commanded by Major Trewnson, and should the thousand Mysore Horses which are expected at Dharwar have arrived there, you will avail yourself of their services in the movement upon Kittoor.

Chaplin came over personally to Tadkod on 28th November, 1824, to supervise the operations. He entrusted the task of investing Kittur to Col. Walker of the Madras Cavalry. There was brisk activity in all the British army units preparing for the attack on Kittur. Chaplin wrote a detailed letter to Newnham on the 29th,

apprising him of the happenings since his departure from Bombay on the 17th. The relevant extract, quoted below, may be of interest:

> On my way down I received visits from most of the *patwardhans* and some other *jahagirdars* in this part of the country who have since returned to their usual places of residence. Chintamani Rao pleaded the illness of his son as an excuse for not visiting me, and Gopal Rao of Jamkhandi, having missed me upon the road to Belgaum, overtook my camp at that place and was so urgent in his request to be allowed to come on with me that I was unable, without giving him offence, to refuse a compliance with his wishes, which I had the least hesitation in granting, as I entertain a perfect confidence in his friendly intentions. He is now encamped near me with about 250 Horse Artillery.
>
> I am sorry, however, to report that the conduct of the Raja of Kolhapur has been far from satisfactory or free from suspicion. When I passed near his capital, on my march to Belgaum he was ill or pretended to be ill, but as he sent out some of his officers to attend me and to make his excuse for not having himself paid me a visit, I had no reason to be displeased at not having had an interview with him. On my arrival at Belgaum, I found that he had suddenly recovered from his indisposition which had been represented as severe and had actually marched, contrary to the advice of the Bayee dowager, from Kolhapur,

with 5,000 foot soldiers, 1,000 Horse Artillery and seven guns with the avowed intention of coming to see me. On receiving instruction to this effect, I immediately apprised him by letter that however gratified I should be by the pleasure of an interview with him, my time was now so much occupied that our meeting was impracticable and I, therefore, begged that it might be deferred. When I last heard of him he was at Yamkunmurdee (Yamankan-amardi) or in that vicinity where it was said he was reluctantly halted in consequence of the receipt of my communication. As I learnt, however, that he was still moving, long after my letter must have been received, I told his *vakils*, who are in attendance here, that the Raja's march with such a force, at such a time, was extremely ill-timed and ill-judged, and that if he continued to advance, I should be compelled to believe that he was coming with a view to give the countenance to the Kittoor insurgents. I learn today that he has either actually marched or is on the point of marching to Manoolee (Manolee) which belongs to himself under about 25 miles (38 km) north-east of this place. If this turns out to be really true, I think I shall be justified after the warning given to him in believing that his object is at least to give confidence to the rebels if not actually to support them, and it will be expedient in my opinion, when the Kittoor affair is settled, to call him to an account for his conduct, keeping in the meanwhile,

> a strict watch upon his proceedings which, if not hostile, having much of the effect of hostility, at such conjunction as the present.

On 30th November, the army led by Col. McLeod moved to a position very close to Kittur. The Acting Collector of Dharwar, Mr John Munro, who had also come from the army, distinguished himself by his bravery in many battles and had made a name in peninsular India as an able soldier-administrator, joined Lt. Col. McLeod. The army from Belgaum under the command of Col. Trewnson and the army from Khanapur under the command of Lt. Col. Walker had also arrived and taken positions around Kittur. The battering train was expected the next day, 1st December. By then within a radius of about one and-a-half miles (2 km) from Kittur, detachments from Mysore, Chitradurga, Madras, Arcot, Sholapur, Satara, Bombay, Poona and Vengurla had all grouped. Rani Chennamma's men had given all this information to her. She knew that the British army of nearly 25,000 had surrounded Kittur. There was no doubt that the Kittur army was too meagre to fight against this huge army of the British. Even then she did not lose hope. She sent a few urgent messengers towards Manolee from where she had received information that the Kolhapur army was waiting to come to the aid of Kittur. At this stage, that was her only hope.

Chaplin, shrewed politician that he was, watching these developments very closely, had his suspicions about the Kolhapur army coming to the aid of Kittur. His letter to Capt. Crew of the Mysore Horse Artillery on the 1st December informs:

> As the fort of Kittoor has already begun to resist by firing all day from its bastions and as I have some reason to apprehend that the Raja of Collapur (Kolhapur) may come down to assist the rebels, I have to request that you will be so good as to push on another party of Horse Artillery accompanied by 500 Infantry of this neighbourhood. If the Cavalry party consisted of the Clospet horse and guns, it would be highly useful in keeping in check any enemy that might approach to interrupt our operations here.

Rani Chennamma's messengers tried to speed towards Manolee from the north-east gate of the fort but were intercepted by the British soldiers. A brief scuffle ensued and shots were fired, some by the soldiers on watch on the towers within the fort. In this firing, two British soldiers of the Horse Artillery and their mounts were killed. This was sufficient provocation for the British. They opened fire at the fort, and drew immediate reaction. There was an intermittent exchange of fire the whole day.

The Kittur *vakil* was still negotiating with Chaplin for more favourable terms. Angered by the outbreak of hostilities, the latter told the *vakil* that if the Kittur

rebels did not surrender before the midnight of 1st December, he would order his army to attack the fort from all the sides and to breach it. He sent a detailed report to Newnham about the latest situation and outlined the steps he intended to take if the British officers were not released and the Kittur leaders did not lay down arms.

That morning, Chaplin sent word to Rani Chennamma that if the two British officers were not returned by 10.00 A.M., the entire Kittur army would be massacred. Rani Chennamma deliberated with her officers and decided to gain a little more time by stopping all hostilities even as a transitory measure. So she sent word through her *vakil* that if the British agreed that there would be no war if the two gentlemen were safely returned, she would agree to release them. Chaplin assured the Kittur *vakil* on his word of honour that all hostilities would be stopped, if the two officers were safely handed over and negotiations continued. Accordingly, on the second evening at 9 o'clock, Stevenson and Elliot were conducted safely to the British camp. The Kittur *vakils* were still pleading vehemently about the continuation of the Kittur *samsthan* by abrogating the provision in the proclamation declaring the Kittur *samsthan* as being extinct and consequently annexed to the British territory. Stevenson and Elliot also pleaded for sympathetic consideration of these demands. Chaplin,

reporting these developments to Newnham, wrote on 2nd December:

> I have much pleasure in stating that the two gentlemen were brought into camp at 9 o'clock this evening, and I think that this particular act of submission may be an earnest intention of the insurgent Chiefs to conform to the remaining part of my stipulation; at present, however, the *vakils* plead vehemently that the *samsthan* may be continued and an act of oblivion passed urging that the (*katak*) soldiery who appear to be under little control of their leaders are bent upon resistance unless more favourable terms than those offered in the proclamation are concerned. I have finally informed them that I cannot make any substantive alteration in the conditions of the proclamation but that in consideration of their having well treated Messers Stevenson and Elliot and of their having at last released those gentlemen, I will put the most liberal construction upon every part of the conditions, provided the fort be given up, and the garrison surrendered by 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

While the *vakil* and others deputed to accompany Messers Stevenson and Elliot were yet in my tent, many guns were fired from the fort and a party of Horse and Foot Artillery approaching one of our piquets, they were driven back by a discharge of grape from one of our six pounders; since then all firing appears

to have ceased, and it has been agreed that hostilities shall be suspended on either side, each keeping within his own limits till the hour tomorrow above specified. I am sorry to say that I have no confidence that this engagement will be fulfilled on the enemy's part, as their people are evidently under no sort of discipline.

There is no reason to fear that, in spite of every endeavour to give publicity to our proclamation, we have been but partially successful, the villages outside being cut off from communication with the fort and no paper being allowed to reach the inside without first passing through the hands of the leader Goorsiddya (Gurusiddappa) who has, of course, suppressed all the copies that have come into his possession, he being the only person excepted from the general amnesty.

I had it read over to all the people who accompanied Messers Stevenson and Elliot to camp this morning and as it consisted of many people, the contents must have now become very clear to all who are interested.

Before the above-mentioned gentlemen were allowed to quit the fort, they were sworn to intercede on behalf of the *samsthan* and they have accordingly said everything that they could do with justice as to their own good treatment by Gurusiddappa and to his forbearance from committing devastations, as he might have done since the chief authority has been in his hands.

> Colonel Deacon with the battering train arrived within 4 miles (6 km) of camp this morning; some difficulty in passing a swamp having delayed the progress of the guns longer than was expected.

In the meantime, the battering train in the command of Col. Deacon had arrived in the early hours of the morning of 2nd December. But now that the two officers had been safely returned, Chaplin, who was a very cunning and unscrupulous person, went back on his word that hostilities would be stopped. He took a firm and haughty stand and insisted that every word of the proclamation should be respected, that the Kittur army must surrender, and that the Kittur rulers should accept all the conditions mentioned in the proclamation. He further threatened that if the army did not surrender by 10 o'clock on 3rd December, the battering train would start firing to breach the fort. There was sporadic firing throughout the day on 2nd December. On the morning of 3rd again, Rani Chennamma and Veeravva sent a joint letter to Chaplin, pointing out his treachery in having gone back on his word that there would be no war, and reminded him about his promise that the *samsthan* would be allowed to continue. The letter (translation) states:

> Your letter of yesterday's date has been received and the communication conveyed through Narasingha Rao Mazumdar understood by us; in neither can we perceive any symptoms of benefit towards the

samsthan. You desire in your letter that all the people should come forth from the fort loyally disposed towards the government, and that, failing to do so, their lives would not be saved.

Mr Thackeray by his severity brought this present state of affairs on us. We were extremely desirous that through your coming, everything should be continued to us upon the ancient footing, but you, feeling differently disposed towards us have written as we have mentioned. You wrote that if we released the gentlemen there would be no war; upon this promise we released the gentlemen; your Horse (artillery) then began to advance and your battery was prepared to open fire upon us. Our Horses (artillery) were then sent out as a picket and four cannon shots were fired at them. We then fired two guns; we committed no aggression until we had been attacked by you in the first instance.

You wish the fort to be evacuated. To this we reply that we consider you as our superior and could not have believed that we should have been brought to this condition. You wrote that if we did not surrender and declare ourselves loyal subjects of the government by 10 o'clock today, you would commence an attack upon us. We were before told by you that there would be no war and were satisfied that an investigation would be made respecting Mr Thackeray's proceedings and that the *samsthan* would be confirmed to us. We can perceive, in your last letter, no demonstration of such a result. You

desire us today to declare our allegiance to the British government. We accompanied and assisted General Wellesley with our arms. We acted as allies to Major General Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Belgaum, when he, feeling satisfied with the assistance that we had afforded gave us a *sannad* for the continuation of our *samsthan* from generation to generation, which *sannad* by your kindness has been in force up to this day. What can we now write in reply to your communication, that putting aside investigation you will attack us. You are superior. Let it be your part to acquire to yourself renown by supporting us and the 1,000 dependants who are with us; by this course you will be esteemed. We mentioned that we were wholly averse to war. You, disregarding this feeling, show a disposition to be hostile. When the period given us shall have expired what remedy have we? It is according to your own pleasure.

Let your favourable disposition towards the *samsthan* be continued undiminished.

Chaplin chose to ignore the letter as he had made up his mind and was adamant in his decision. He waited up to 11 o'clock on the 3rd of December and ordered Col. Deacon to start the operations until the Kittur soldiers surrendered and the fort was occupied. That very day he also issued a proclamation imposing martial law to cower down the people of Kittur who had any sympathy for the rebels.

While the above letter was being written, he received an answer from the fort, containing a

refusal of the terms offered. He sent with the letter a translation of the communication. The letter carried the instructions:

> Being empowered by the government to declare martial law in the southern Mahratta country wherever the circumstances of the case require it, I consider that time to have arrived, and I shall immediately issue a proclamation to that effect. By this instrument, you will have authority to try by court martial all persons owing allegiance to the British government who shall be taken in arms, in open hostility to the British government or in the overt act of rebellion against the state, or in the act of openly aiding and abetting the enemies of the British government within any part of the said territories.

All attempts for an amicable settlement having failed, Rani Chennamma decided to prepare for battle and hold on as long as possible to see if the Kolhapur army would be coming to her aid. She, therefore, sent for her Sardars and gave them instructions. The loyal Sardars and the troops assured Rani Chennamma on a solemn oath that they would fight for their beloved queen and the freedom of Kittur to the last man. They took positions and the die was cast.

A contingent of the British army had, in the meanwhile, advanced towards the western side of

Kemmanamaradi which was strongly guarded by Rani Chennamma's soldiers. The British army which was more than 25,000 strong spread itself around Kemmanamaradi by moving some of the regiments to the north by the side of Ranagatti tank and another regiment towards Tumbikeri to the south. The Kittur stronghold, Kemmanamaradi, was thus encircled by the British army and they launched attacks from all the three sides. While Col. Deacon, assisted by Col. Walker, Lt. Col. McLeod, Lt. Col. Munro and Lt. Trewnson headed the British forces, the Kittur army was led by Sardar Gurusiddappa, assisted by Awaradi Veerappa, Golandas Himmat Singh, Narasing Rao, Guruputrappa, Appanna Desagaon, Sangolli Rayanna, Bichagatti Chanabasappa and Gajaveera. These were renowned Kittur warriors.

Firing continued throughout the 3rd of December. The heavily armed mammoth army of the British, making a concerted attack on Kemmanamaradi under the only pretext of the 'great' cause of subjugating the children of the soil, stamped as rebels by their government, appeared as though no match to the brave Kittur soldiers. Outnumbered, not as well-equipped, the Kittur fighters had an invincible shield—they were armoured by the love of their motherland and of freedom. They fought bravely as they had always done. They fought with courage, determination and valour. Each one took his toll before succumbing to the

enemy's onslaught. The words of Rani Chennamma were still ringing in their ears. They rushed recklessly towards the British soldiers and massacred them. There was fierce hand-to-hand combat and both British and Kittur soldiers fell in number on the battlefield around Kemmanamaradi. By the night of 3rd December, the bastion of Kemmanamaradi had been reduced to a mere skeleton. The few surviving soldiers retreated towards the east to Gadadmaradi on the eastern side, towards Kittur fort. On the 4th morning, the British soldiers swooped on Gadadmaradi where the Kittur warriors put up a valiant fight. Sardar Gurusiddappa was directing the army from the ramparts of Gadadmaradi. Rani Chennamma was holding her army inside the fort and preparing to resist the enemy from inside. The whole of the morning of 4th December, the Kittur soldiers tried to hold Gadadmaradi, but were soon vanquished. Most of the Kittur soldiers were killed; the few who survived retreated into the fort, their last hope.

Having decimated the enemy, Col. Deacon ordered his men to move towards the fort and put the battering train into operation. The train was moved close to the main entrance of the fort. There was heavy shelling on the fort throughout the day and regular exchange of gunfire. Even as the Kittur forces were trying to defend the fort, there was treachery among the ranks—the gunpowder had been tampered with and rendered ineffective. The end had come. Rani Chennamma's hopes of outside

help had been shattered. The Chhatrapati of Kolhapur had been prevaricating and before he could reach any decision, the British had already vanquished Kittur. For Rani Chennamma there appeared to be no hope. She would have been happy to die on the battlefield. Even death had deluded her. The roaring guns of Kittur had been silenced by the treachery of her own people. The traitors, however, were not allowed to go free. The infuriated loyal Sardars of Rani Chennamma traced these traitors, Kannur Veerasangappa and Hurakadli Mallappa, and got them trampled by elephants.

The Kittur soldiers continued to fight with their backs to the wall. Late in the night, on 4th December, the fort breached and the British rushed in. The few soldiers inside the fort tried to resist but were soon overpowered. Some were taken into custody while a few escaped, but many of them died fighting for the freedom of their motherland. The fort was occupied by the British army in the early hours of the morning on 5th December. Thousands had been slain. On the British side also there were many casualties. Mr Munro, Acting Collector, was fatally wounded and taken to Dharwar, where he died on 11th December.

When all their efforts to save Kittur had failed and the army vanquished, the few Sardars escaped from the fort; among these were Awaradi Veerappa, Kinkeri Venkanna and Kumma Imam. They had escaped into the jungles on the western side towards Shamsherghur.

The few survivors who were fighting were battered into submission; among these were Sardar Gurusiddappa and Sangolli Rayanna. The smuggled British money had played its part. Rani Chennamma yielded to the importunities of her gallant Sardars and tried to escape with her daughter-in-law, Veeravva and Janakibai, through the north-east gate of the fort towards Sangolli. But they were apprehended by the British soldiers and taken into custody. Chaplin who was naturally jubilant over this victory sent a letter to Newnham the same day, giving a detailed account of the episode:

> Adverting to my despatch of yesterday evening communicating the surrender of Kittoor, I have the honour to acquaint for the information of the Hon'ble the Governor-in-Council that the actual occupation of the fort was last night resisted by the garrison, notwithstanding all Colonel Deacon's personal endeavours to persuade them to submit but in the course of the night, the principal of the insurgent Chiefs surrendered themselves on the condition of their lives being spared and the remainder of the soldiery that had not previously escaped being quite disheartened by the energetic measures pursued against them, agreed this morning to lay down their arms; both upper and lower forts were in consequence occupied by the British troops at about 8 a.m. this morning.
>
> The names of the Chiefs who had given themselves up are specified in the margin.

A small body is supposed to have escaped at the head of which is Auradee (Awaradi) Veerappa, who had throughout the affair been a ringleader of the soldiery and apprehensive of being called to account for former acts of atrocity, has been prominent in his opposition to the government. He is supposed to have gone off towards Shamsheerghur accompanied by Kinkery Venkuna, who is Chief of a party of *munshees* and three *gumashtas* named Govindaiah, Naraen and Yasovantha.

Kumma Imam of Deogaum, Chief of a gang of desperadoes, is said also to have fled in the same direction. I have offered rewards for the apprehension of each of these persons.

It is supposed, if hard pressed, that the fugitive will endeavour to escape down the Ghats into the Goa territory. I do not imagine they will attempt to hold Shamsherghur, to occupy which fort I have requested Colonel Deacon to send a military detachment.

Colonel Deacon had already at my suggestion made very practicable arrangement for the protection of the females of the family of the late Desai, for whom it is my intention to recommend a suitable maintenance.

A committee has been appointed by that officer to make an inventory of the treasures and property taken, which I presume is considerable, as I am informed that only a small portion of which was sealed up by Mr Thackeray has been abstracted by the rebels.

Mr Stevenson has been instructed to carry into effect the orders that had been issued by the late Mr Thackeray for the occupation and management of the Kittoor territory.

I propose for the present to confine the most prominent of the Kittoor insurgents in the fort of Belgaum until I am furnished with orders of the government for my guidance by the conditions on which they surrendered, their lives must be spared but they are liable to such other punishment as the Hon'ble the Governor-in-Council may deem appropriate to the overt act of rebellion of which they have been infatuated enough to be guilty, notwithstanding the uncommonly lenient and liberal terms that we held out to them, provided they returned to their allegiance without further resistance.

I have great pleasure in stating that I feel much indebted to Colonel Walker of the 8th Madras for the promptitude with which he cooperated with me before Colonel Desai's arrival and my acknowledgement are no less due to Colonel Deacon for his cordial assistance whilst my negotiations were pending. The able and judicious arrangements which the latter distinguished officer has been enabled in so short a space of time to reduce the strong fort of Kittoor, defended as they were by garrison of an unusually determined character for its spirit and energy, are far above my praise but will, I am sure, be fully appreciated by the Hon'ble Governor-in-Council.

> The gallantry of the troops led on by Colonel McLeod of the 4th Madras Cavalry to the assault of the enemy's entrenched post of Khimummurdi, which I had myself the satisfaction of witnessing from an adjoining height, will I doubt not, be brought to the notice of the government by the proper authority.
>
> I cannot close this despatch without expressing also my appreciation of the zeal and activity of Captains Spiller and Jameson of my escort.

Thus ended one of the glorious chapters in our country's history. The wide open grounds of the Kittur fort were littered with dead bodies of the valiant freedom fighters. On the heap of these dead bodies, the Union Jack was rasied above the clouds of gunpowder smoke enveloping the sky on the morning of 5 December, 1824, and was seen fluttering from the ramparts of the battered Kittur fort. The small army of this tiny state had no doubt been vanquished and massacred by the British by strength of sheer numbers. Kittur was desolate. It was one of the darkest days in our country's history. But the inspiring qualities of leadership, patriotism, courage, valour and fortitude shown by Rani Chennamma in this heroic battle, have been a source of inspiration to generations of people in this part of the country. The fire of the love of freedom kindled by Rani Chennamma was not extinguished by this defeat; it only lay dormant for a while.

8

THE AFTERMATH

Soon after the defeat of the Kittur army, Chaplin took into custody the few surviviors. Prominent among these were Sardar Gurusiddappa and Sangolli Rayanna. The Commissioner, then, with the help of Stevenson and a few other officers, ransacked the whole palace and plundered all the wealth. It is said that the British took away the entire cash in the treasury amounting to ₹ 16 lakhs and jewellery worth about ₹ 4 lakhs. They also took into possession 3,000 horses, 2,000 camels and about 100 elephants of the Kittur army, and the entire stock of gun powder, thirty-six cannons, fifty-six guns, and a large quantity of miscellaneous arms like swords, bows, arrows, spears, etc. At that time, the Kittur *desgat* had 286 villages and seventy-two hamlets, and its annual income was in the neighbourhood off ₹ 4 lakhs.

Rani Chennamma and Veeravva, the widow of Shivalingarudra Sarja, and Janakibai, the widow of her late son Shivabasavaraj, were detained in the Kittur palace for about a week thereafter. They were forced to sign a document conceding the Kittur *desgat* to the British. They were then sent under heavy escort to the impregnable fortress of Bailhongal and kept as political prisoners. A pension was fixed for all the three ladies of the Kittur ruling family, amounting to a total of about ₹ 40,000 per annum.

There was an uneasy calm in the Kittur territory for some time. Even so, many people in Kittur dreamed of regaining the Kittur *desgat*. The impressive fortress and the towers of Kittur palace, which were visible embodiments of the past glory of Kittur, kept these hopes green in the minds of the people. Chaplin thought that these buildings, which kept alive the memory of Rani Chennamma in the minds of her people, should be razed to the ground so that they no longer act as constant reminders of its former splendour. Therefore, the main portion of the palace was ordered to be pulled down. The massive and teak pillars of the magnificent porch were sold by auction for paltry amounts. The other precious wooden grills, ornamental window frames and doors were also either sold or allowed to be taken away. There was a veritable public licence to plunder the palace property.

Rani Chennamma and Veeravva, languishing in the Bailhongal prison, dreamed of another rebellion in

Kittur by their loyal Sardars and the restoration of the *desgat*. Some Kittur rebels like Sangolli Rayanna met them incognito on a few occasions and apprised them of the news about Kittur. Rani Chennamma encouraged them to organise another revolt, but this was not to be on account of the demoralisation that had set in after the humiliating defeat and gruesome massacre of thousands of people in the Kittur battle.

Rani Chennamma spent most of her time in *pooja* and spiritual pursuits. Her constant dream was the liberation of Kittur for which she pined day and night. She hoped against hope, but nothing came to pass. In the dark and dingy cell of Bailhongal fort, the sorrowing, careworn Rani sat dreaming of the day when she would lead another fight against the British, and when her beloved people of Kittur would be free and her state restored to independence. Rani Chennamma thus withered away, day by day. After nearly five years of confinement in the Bailhongal fort, she died on 2 February,1829.

She was buried at Bailhongal with full military honours. A tomb has been erected on her *samadhi*. Within a few months, on 20 July, 1829, her daughter-in-law, Janakibai also died, still in prison. Thus ended the life of the great queen, Rani Chennamma, who had blazed a glorious trail of revolt in the gloomy dark hours of slavery towards the dawn of a full-fledged rebellion against the British rule in India.

9 THE SMOULDERING EMBERS

Although Rani Chennamma had been vanquished, the Kittur army defeated and Kittur *desgat* annexed, the Kittur people continued to have the same affection and pride for the Kittur rulers and the same love for Kittur land. They smouldered with the fire of rebellion and waited for an opportunity to rise up against the arrogant British.

Sangolli Rayanna

There were many sporadic eruptions. The most important of such outbursts was the rebellion led by Sangolli Rayanna in 1829-1830. Rayanna was one of the most loyal and patriotic followers of Rani Chennamma. He had promised Rani Chennamma that he would continue the fight even after her death. He had her

example always before his eyes. Sangolli Rayanna was a village watchman in Sangolli, a village about thirteen miles (19 km) north of Kittur, a retainer of the Kittur Desai, who had received a pardon for his part in the 1824 outbreak. He collected a group of loyal followers of Rani Chennamma with the avowed object of restoring the *desgat* to Shivalingappa, the adopted son of Shivalingarudra Sarja, and lawful heir to the Kittur *desgat*. He raised a relentless rebellion against the British for nearly two years. During those two years, Sangolli Rayanna attacked the British strongholds from many points by resorting to guerrilla warfare. He operated from his base in Balagund and Handi-Badaganath hills. During the year 1830, for four months continuously, he attacked and plundered the treasuries and offices in the Kittur region. The most successful attacks were at Nandgada, Beedi, Sampagaon and Khanapur. He had become a terror to the British who became extremely agitated.

The people of Kittur *desgat* naturally sympathised with Rayanna and his rebellious activities. The British officers and soldiers failed to track him. They announced cash awards to any one who would seize and hand him over to them. Even this did not yield any result. They then caught hold of some disgruntled traitors and hatched a plot to trap Rayanna. One Linganagouda of Khodanapur, who was a distant relative of the Kittur royal family, wanted to give his son in adoption to the

Kittur *desgat* but had been disappointed. He was nursing a grievance against Rani Chennamma and the Kittur rulers. Ever since, he was constantly in touch with the British officers and carrying tales against them. The British caught Linganagouda and instigated him to hatch a wicked plan to get Rayanna arrested. Physically weak and wicked by nature, Linganagouda gave in. He took the help of another person, Naginhal Venkanagouda, who was a physically strong and well-built person. Once again, it was the treachery of our own people which helped the British consolidate their kingdom. Together they played the role of traitors. They pretended to join Rayanna in his rebellion against the British and followed him for a few months. One day, when Rayanna was taking his bath, they arranged to get a group of armed police to arrest him. Rayanna was completely taken by surprise and was overpowered and arrested by the British police. He was convicted and sentenced to death. The British wanted to terrorise the people and decided to hang him in a public place at Nandgada, which was one of his favourite haunts. Only a few days earlier he had successfully looted the treasury at this place. He was hanged on 28 December, 1830. He stood smiling as he faced his fast approaching death.When the British officer asked him what his last wish would be, Sangolli Rayanna replied, "My last wish is to be born again in this land to fight against the British and drive them away from this sacred land." A chair was brought to him to step up and

put the noose around his neck. He kicked the chair away and took the noose in his hand and put it around his neck, and asked the executioners to pull the noose. This indomitable spirit could not but evoke reverence for the mettle of this great freedom fighter.

Veeravva

Veeravva, who had survived the death of Rani Chennamma and also of Janakibai, was kept in the Bailhongal prison for some time. Being of the same stuff that Chennamma was made of, Veeravva too was a woman of indomitable courage, and she too had determined to fight to the last for the freedom of Kittur. She sent secret messages to the freedom fighters of Kittur. She sent money to some Sardars of Kittur who were trying to organise another revolt. The British came to know about this. They decided to shift Veeravva from Bailhongal to a distant place. It was intended to send her first to Kusugal and then from there to Malegaon in Khandesh district. When the people came to know about this, they collected in large numbers around the Bailhongal fort to resist her being shifted from there. More than a thousand people gathered outside the fort. The British brought a huge army to put down any resistance. The people felt helpless and dispersed.

Veeravva was sent under heavy escort to Kusugal fort. There, her health deteriorated day by day and when the British sensed that she was fast languishing to death, she was sent to a family of her relatives in Dharwar.

After she recovered a little, she was brought to the Ulavi Chennabasaveshwar Temple and, it is said, she was administered poison by the then Collector of Dharwar, Mr Babar. Her tragic end has been vividly described in some folk-songs. Before finally taking poison, she sought Babar's permission to have a last glimpse of Kittur. She went up on the terrace on the roof of the temple and, climbing a few steps of a ladder, she nostalgically looked at the palace towers of Kittur and heaved a deep sigh, recapitulating its past splendour. Then she came down, gulped down the poison administered to her, and died a martyr's death.

Shankaranna and others

Again, in 1833, one Shankaranna made an unsuccessful attempt to raise a revolt against the British rule in Kittur. In 1836, another group of rebels led by Nagappa, Gajapati and Sawai Rudrappa Kotagi, tried to secure help from the Portuguese of Goa to rise against the British. This too was abortive. In 1837, Shivalingappa, who was popularly known as Sawai Mallasarja, led a revolt but was apprehended and arrested and was imprisoned for some time in Dodwad fort. In 1845, Shivalingappa made yet another attempt to rise against the British in Sampagaon and Beedi. His own father-in-law, the Desai of Wantamuri, gave information to the British about his plans. Some implicating correspondence was traced and Shivalingappa was taken into custody and kept in prison

for a while. A few months later, after obtaining surety from the Desai of Wantamuri and the Raja of Sangli, to which region Shivalingappa belonged, he was released. And finally, in 1857, Shivalingappa undaunted, made another abortive attempt to rise against the British.

The fire kindled by Rani Chennamma had not been doused; it lay dormant in the hearts of the freedom-loving people of Kittur for more than three decades and although all their attempts were foiled, they were the forerunners of such future uprisings all over the country. In the same year, i.e. 1857, the first war of independence had started. Rani Chennamma's fight undoubtedly was the beginning of the freedom struggle in India. She has, therefore, been rightly called the 'morning star' of India's freedom struggle.

10 EMBALMED HISTORY

Although more than 150 years have elapsed after the last battle of Kittur, the memory of the indomitable spirit and of the splendour and glorious history of this palace is green in the minds and hearts of the people through innumerable poems, folk-songs, plays, etc. It is also kept alive and embalmed in many relics, which lie scattered all over the northern part of Karnataka. The most important of such relics are, undoubtedly, the ruins of the fort and the palace at Kittur.

The Kittur Fort

One can see today only the dilapidated walls and ruins of the great fort which was one day known for its strength. The most important landmark as one goes towards the fort is the 'Bahadurgad'. Situated to the

south-west of the fort and outside of it, on a natural hillock, the highest in the plain, the Bahadurgad, which was the watch-tower, provides the most panoramic and commanding view of the sparsely wooded surrounding region of green grassland, fading as if gradually into soft contoured hills in the west and the horizons on the other sides. To the north of the tower is the 'Ranagattikere' where Rani Chennamma fought her last stubborn fight against the British, with almost savage determination.

The actual fort, circular in plan, consisted of double walls, separated by moats on the outer sides, with semi-circular bastions on the exterior of the outer wall. It had originally the main gateway on the east, approached by the causeway across the outer moat known as *arte honda* which was used for bathing the elephants.

The entrances through the walls are deliberately not aligned, evidently in the interests of security. After passing by the winding path through the walls, one is led to the front side of the imposing main entrance of the palace located near the northern arc of the inner fort wall.

To the south of the palace, inside the fort, are the ruins of horse-stables and foundations of residential buildings, probably meant for the important officials of the palace. To the south-west is the heavily built watch-tower relieved by a series of parallel buttresses at regular intervals.

The Palace

The main gateway to the palace, now in ruins, is provided with a series of guard-rooms for soldiers and horsemen. The most impressive feature of the palace is the front porch which was 100 feet (30 metres) wide and 30 feet (9 metres) deep. The facade of the porch was relieved by a series of tall, structural, stone pillars with heavy stone base.

The entire palace is a masterpiece of planning. The relative positions of the sitting-cum-guest rooms, the assembly room, dining hall, store rooms, bathrooms, have all been so well arranged that every part is independently approached without passing through the other parts and with minimum lead. Every room is provided with two entrances, each leading to a different room, all these providing examples of meticulous planning. While a detailed description of the palace and of its rooms is not necessary, there are, however a few important features which deserve to be noticed. The most impressive interior part of the palace is the assembly hall, which is not too large and which was meant for confidential meetings with Sardars and other high officials. The hall is provided with back-rests in the walls. Adjoining the assembly hall is a very big dining hall meant for occasional dinners arranged in honour of the royal guests, etc. On the left of the palace is an open pond which served as a swimming pool for the members of the royal family. In the front portion of the palace, to the left side, is a room for a unique purpose:

in the middle of the walls of this room is an obliquely fixed iron pipe of about one-and-a-half feet (0.4 m) in diameter, open to the sky, and meant for viewing the Pole Star. In front of the pipe is a platform to sit on. More ingenious than all these is the excellent water supply system from one common source to the whole palace. In the centre of the large, open, back verandah there is a water well at the centre. Water receiving bowls made of fine stone, and water tanks on the sides and at two corners, adjoin the inside back wall of the palace. Water was poured from the well into these bowls from where it was carried to all the water tanks and to the well behind the kitchen through concealed copper pipes. Stone wash troughs (resembling the porcelain washbasins of today, but obviously indicating its crude form) have been provided at the right places in different parts of the dining hall, kitchen and other rooms.

Another interesting feature of the palace is the excellent garden provided with cisterns and fountain jets and so on. The bricks used for the floor in the garden are of very high quality and of different shapes and sizes. The walls, some of which are intact even today, are only 6 inches (16 cm) thick, but incredibly strong. The whole palace is of ashlar masonry built with haematite quartz, rubble and dressed stone and strong slaked lime mortar. The pillars are also constructed with circular discs, greenish schist stones, placed one on the other, using the same mortar as binding material.

The surface is plastered partly, such as the niches in the walls, the walls of the bathrooms and kitchen and the lower parts of the walls of the rooms. The floors are very well paved with well-dressed rectangular slabs of schist stone. The windows and niches in the wall are so arranged as to provide light and air to the side walls and rooms. The ashlar masonry and arched niches clearly indicate the tradition of the Muslim-Maratha architecture in the survival phase for the tradition, and the Kittur palace is one of the finest specimens of this type of architecture.

Mausolea in Precincts of the *Kalmath* at Kittur

Of the relics in Kittur, the next in importance are the mausolea of the various rulers of Kittur who have been buried in the precincts of the *kalmath* of Kittur. There are in all six mausolea. They are of Mudimallappa Sardesai, Malava Rudragouda *alias* Phakirarudra Sarja, Veerappagouda Sardesai, Mallasarja, Balasaheb, son of Rani Chennamma, and Shivalingarudra Sarja. The mausolea of Mudimallappa Sardesai, Mallasarja, Balasaheb and Shivalingarudra Sarja are architecturally quite simple, as they consist of one cell containing the *shivalinga* and Nandi (bull), with the burials in underground chambers not accessible or visible from outside. The tomb of Veerappagouda Sardesai, however, consists of two cells, the inner with *shivalinga* and the outer with Nandi. This tomb is considered the

best, with sculptured relief on the walls, a porch and well-carved door frames comparable to that of the 13th-century temple of the Seuna region. Besides, the lower walls near the floor have perforated grills at the cardinal points which provide a view of the mausolea below, through the downward sloping passage, in the mausolea of Phakirarudra Sarja, the subterranean cell containing the tomb is notable for a large carving of a lotus in full bloom in the ceilling. In the interior side walls of the upper cell at the ground level are sculptures of Ganesh and Durga.

Rani Chennamma's Tomb

Rani Chennamma's tomb at Bailhongal is a very modest one, on which recently a small, black, stone statue of Rani Chennamma in a sitting posture, performing *pooja*, has been mounted.

The Cenotaph

There are some important relics at Dharwar. The most important among them is the cenotaph erected by the British in memory of Thackeray. Around this cenotaph, a park has been developed, named 'Kittur Chennamma Park'. Towards the western part of the city in the European cemetery, one can see tombs of European officers who died in the Kittur battle of 23 October, 1824. The most important among them is the tomb of Thackeray. In this tomb is fixed a slab of

brown marble on which are inscribed the following words:

The remains of
St. John Thackeray, Esq.
Principal Collector and Political Agent
Southern Maratha Doab
Killed in the insurrection of Kittur
October 23rd, 1824
Are interred here

A little away from this tomb is another tomb wherein the remains of the bodies of Capt. Black, Lt. Sewell and Lt. Deighton have been buried. On this tomb also is fixed a beautiful brown marble slab on which are inscribed the following words:

To the memory of
Captain Black and of
Lt. Sewell and Deighton
Of the Madras Horse
Artillery
Who lost their lives
In gallantly attempting
To quell the insurrection
At Kittoor
On the 23rd of Oct., 1824
* * *
Erected by their Friends
Who withnessed their devoted

Conduct in that unfortunate
Affair

All these relics are an imperishable record of the glorious role played by Rani Chennamma in the history of India's freedom struggle, and they continue to serve as an inexhaustible source of inspiration to generations of freedom-loving young men and women in this part of the country.

11

IMMORTAL KITTUR

Kittur was a tiny state when compared with most other Indian states that existed before India's independence. Many of these states and *jahagirs,* which were allowed to continue, had their existence prolonged because they either helped the British to build up their empire in India or made compromises with the British and bartered away their freedom. In the wake of India's independence, they were wiped out of existence, and today most of them have been completely forgotten. But unlike these 600-odd states, the name of Kittur is today alive not only in our history books but in the innumerable ballads, folk-songs, plays, poems and other writings, as in the minds and hearts of the people. The story of the gallant fight of Rani Chennamma is on

the lips of hundreds of villagers who sing the songs of her glory and her heroic deeds are, on many occasions, vividly brought to life on the stage and on the screen, inspiring people all over Karnataka.

Kittur is immortal today because of Rani Chennamma's everlasting contribution to the glorious heritage of freedom struggle in India. It suffered a crushing military defeat in its fight against the British. So did many other states in India. However, the greatness or splendour of any state is not judged by its success or defeat in the battlefield. The spirit that animated the gallant soldiers of Kittur, the noble ideals that inspired them, are what constitute their greatness. Kittur's efforts to keep the torch of freedom burning, its splendid example of courage and determination to stake everything to preserve its liberty, have made it immortal. The patriotic fervour and the love of freedom among the people of Kittur was inspired by Rani Chennamma whose name is remembered with great respect and admiration.

Rani Chennamma, although a queen of a small state, had great qualities of leadership, such as statesmanship, indomitable courage, keen political acumen, an uncanny judgement of men and affairs, a presence of mind in keeping with any emergency, and a deep knowledge of military strategies. She was a skilful administrator and resourceful diplomat. She could take decisions at the spur of the moment, and once she took a decision, she was firm in executing it. More than all these, she

loved Kittur, the land and its people. All these qualities made her almost a legend in her own lifetime. Her actions always spoke of these great qualities. She had the courage to defy the British by holding a *durbar* and declaring the continuity of the state. She tried her utmost to avoid war, if she could do it without compromising the independence of her state. She negotiated with the British with great dignity, firmness and equanimity, displaying remarkable qualities of statesmanship in these negotiations. She was firm in her demand of autonomy for the state. But she knew what to concede, and when negotiations failed and war became inevitable, she could rouse the conscience of her people.

The people of Kittur rose as a courageous and committed lot in response to her clarion call. She was profoundly humane and magnanimous at the time of her victory. She forgave the prisoners and released them. She protected and sent back the captive women and children of the British army officers, in the true tradition of Indian kings in the treatment of their prisoners. But when it was a question of the freedom of Kittur, there could be no compromise. She was prepared to die fighting for it. It is because of these qualities that she could infuse such loyalty and patriotism among her people. They were prepared to lay down their lives at her bidding.

The fight the Kittur soldiers gave to the British, in spite of their meagre strength in arms and equipments, is a rare instance of such a small force holding at bay a much

superior and mighty army, by sheer strength of courage and determination. Even the British officers, who witnessed the fight, have described their spirit in glowing terms. Chaplin, Commissioner of the Deccan, speaking about the courage, valour and determination of Kittur soldiers, said, "They have drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard." Stevenson, poitical agent to Chaplin, in one of his letters, has made a mention of "the ungovernable spirit and fury" of the Kittur rebels. The finest tribute, however, was paid by Chaplin while reporting the final victory over Kittur. He has recorded that "the strong fort of Kittur was defended by a garrison of an unusually determined character for its spirit and energy."

For many years after the defeat of Kittur, there were occasional sporadic attempts to revolt against the alien rule, and to install the rightful heirs on the throne. This displayed a unique and implicit loyalty of the people of the region to the Kittur ruling family. Even as late as in 1831, the Bombay political despatches*[5] to London quote the reports of Mr Nisbet, Collector of Dharwar, in the following words:

> . . . Every day brings to light, some fresh disclosure to confirm the belief that the whole province is united in one common cause and the people have, by some

[5] *Bombay Despatches*, Vol. 59,pp. 365-76, Political, 21 September, 1863.

means, been inspired with the idea that it may be possible to recover their independence.

In another letter, he is said to have reported as follows:

> It is with much concern that I am forced to state that I am now firmly convinced that the people of the country, from a strong attachment to their former government, are ready and willing to obey any directions from them which they may receive.

He further reported that the people of the region believe that "the time had arrived for the restoration of the Desai and that they must go and fight in his cause." In support of his fears, Nisbet reported that out of 3,474 *shetsanadis* who were summoned by the Collector to Dharwar, to declare their allegiance to the British, only 499 obeyed the summons. The rest of them who chose to remain absent still seemed to owe their allegiance to the Kittur rulers—so deep and great was the unshakeable loyalty of the people to Kittur and its rulers, so ingrained was their love of freedom. It was unconquerable.

The battle of Kittur was the first ever Indian battle for freedom, against the British. The 23rd of October, 1824, will, therefore, go down in history as a great day of victory for a tiny state against the imperial might of the British. It is, therefore, a day of great significance, presaging, as it were, the great war of independence of 1857 and of the freedom movement headed by Mahatma Gandhi,

culminating in the Quit India Movement of 1942. The noble example, the relentless spirit, the courage and valour of Rani Chennamma and her patriotic followers, who smilingly laid their lives, fighting for the freedom of their motherland, will continue to shine across the corridors of history. The figures of that heroic era have gone, but they will live long in our memory.

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